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Provincial linen transformation now complete

A newly minted provincial linen service has already saved Saskatchewan \$10 million.

Over the next 10 years, it's expected to save over \$98 million, says Mark Anderson, Vice-president of Business Development with 3sHealth.

"We started to implement the service last fall and by February 29, the cancer agency and all the health regions were transitioned," he said. "It's been a true collaborative effort on the part of all stakeholders but we're already seeing the benefits, not only in costs but in quality of the linens."

Most of us think of bedding and hospital gowns or scrubs when we think about linen, but the service also includes cleaning supplies like microfiber mops, he says.

Recently, Anderson said the province dramatically increased its supply of microfiber mops.

"Previously, a mop used to clean one patient room might be re-used in a hospital hallway, or another patient room," he said. "We now have enough supply to allow our cleaning staff to use a single mop in every patient room, improving infection prevention and control practices."

The impact of a provincial service is widespread. Now that all the regions have transitioned, other health facilities such as long-term care homes will be brought into the provincial service.

At a recent tour of the K-Bro Linen Systems (K-Bro) plant in Regina, where all provincial healthcare linens are now processed, health region staff involved in the transition got their first glimpse of managing thousands of pounds of hospital laundry every day.

"It was amazing to see the inner workings of the new plant first-hand," said Shirley Wheeler, Director of Environmental Services for Sun Country Health Region. "I have been part of the transition planning from the very beginning and to see how our linen is being processed now is great. It will allow me to answer questions my staff have about some of the changes we have experienced as a result of the new service."

The decision to move to a provincial linen service was made in May 2013. Later that year, it was announced that K-Bro was awarded the contract to deliver the service, with 3sHealth administering the contract and leading the project to transition health regions and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency to the new service.

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On April 15, those who lead their organizations through the transition met in Regina to discuss the transition, share the lessons learned, and plan for the work ahead as the project moves to program status. The day ended with a tour of the new K-Bro plant in Regina.

The transition project encompassed change management, using the Saskatchewan Healthcare Management System tools to identify process changes, stakeholder communications and monthly check-ins with each region and agency. Some facilities incorporated process changes and new inventory early, to make the transition flow easier.

“We worked in partnership with the 3sHealth transition team to prepare for a seamless transition in our region,” says Terry Fjeld, Regional Director Environmental Services at Prince Albert Parkland Health Region. “They helped us identify and work to solve issues ahead of time, like implementing night delivery of carts so the fresh linen is available first thing in the morning and helped us find a solution for temporary storage of soiled linen. The information and support our region received from the 3sHealth team was invaluable.”

As the linen transition project becomes its first new service line, 3sHealth and its linen customers realize there is still much work to do to streamline processes, improve inventory management, and ensure consistent quality. But customers are also finding some immediate improvements. For example, in Kelsey Trail Health Region, the switch from cloth to disposable plastic bags has made a significant difference in worker safety. Aside from improved protection from contagions from the soiled linen, the new bags, which are lighter and hold less, have decreased worker injury from lifting.

“We used to have to use an overhead patient sling to lift the old bags onto the soiled linen carts,” says Michael Lummerding, Manager of Support Services in Kelsey Trail. “Now our staff can manage the weight of the bags quite easily and we can use the patient lift for patients, not dirty laundry!”

The provincial linen team will now engage region and cancer agency partners to develop provincial standards for infection prevention and control – already improved through introduction of a modern, state-of-the-art laundry facility. They will also work with customers to create a standard linen inventory list for both general linen and surgical linen. Standardizing linen products and work processes will enhance the patient experience, improve worker safety and create efficiencies in the service.

“We have come a long way since this project was announced,” says Jim Crawford, Director of Provincial Linen Service for 3sHealth. “Working in partnership with our health system partners transformed the way we deliver linen by transitioning 13 organizations to one new service. We are looking forward to continuing to work together.”