Case Study

Title: Reduction in Towel Usage

Facility: St. Luke’s Hospital - Duluth, MN

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GENERAL BACKGROUND:

St. Luke’s Hospital is a nonprofit, community-based, non-denominational hospital. St. Luke's, located in Duluth, Minnesota, is the hub of a regional health care system, offering a full range of health care services. The system consists of a hospital and a growing network of primary and specialty clinics located in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Approximately 13,000 surgical procedures are performed annually.

St Luke’s Hospital implemented a ComPel® Barrier Technology system through the PrePak® Surgical pack program. The objective of the program is to provide high quality surgical products in sterile pack form to all user departments, in the most cost-effective manner possible.

An integral aspect of the PrePak program is the commitment between the hospital and Standard Textile Company to continue to review and implement strategies to assure the goals of value and quality are achieved. The on-site Quality Monitoring Program (QMP) Visits by the Standard Textile Clinical and Operational Consultants are one method to verify these goals are being met.

During a QMP Visit, the program was found to be well managed and on course. Savings generated by this system are well over the projected savings rates. However, one clinical practice habit was identified that, when eliminated, would provide additional savings to the Hospital.
GOAL:

The strategy was to identify clinical practices that impact the goal of reduced costs. By observing in the Surgical Suites, clinical practice habits can be identified, quantified, and suggestions made that will result in cost reductions for the hospital.

CLINICAL OBSERVATION:

Multiple stacks of 6 towels were observed on the back tables of most cases after all personnel were scrubbed, the patient was draped and the case was started. There are twelve towels in the Basic Pack that is opened for each case.

These towels are used:

* To dry staff hands,
* To “square off” the surgical site,
* As an aiming place for sharps on the Back Table,
* As instrument rolls on the Back Table and the Mayo Stand,
* To separate ties on the Mayo Stand,
* And to clean the patient at the end of the case.

After the case is started there should be only one or two towels remaining to clean the patient at the end of the case. When multiple stacks of six towels are observed at this point in the surgical case, it can only mean that additional towel packs are being opened and not being used.

ACTIONPLAN:

Extra 6-Towel Packs are being opened at the beginning of the surgical case. The staff should be cautioned to only open packs that are necessary at the time. Additional 6-Towel Packs can be available in the room but only opened if needed. If the overuse of towels that was observed continues the cost to the hospital could be substantial. If only one 6-Towel Pack is opened on every surgical case, the cost to the hospital would be over $20,000.00 annually. The following demonstrates the cost savings available if this practice is eliminated.

\[
\begin{align*}
13,000 \times \$1.60 &= \text{Annual surgical procedures} \\
\$20,800 &= \text{6-Towel Pack cost at St. Luke’s} \\
\$20,800 &= \text{Available savings by eliminating one 6-Towel Pack from each surgical procedure.}
\end{align*}
\]
OUTCOME:

The staff was educated through an in-service about the cost involved in opening unnecessary packs, especially Towel Packs. After this in-service, the staff eliminated two towels from the Towel Pack making it a 4-Towel Pack.

Subsequent Clinical QMP Visits showed a significant reduction in the number of towels observed on the back tables. Only approximately 25% of the cases were observed having towel stacks. The following shows the savings that have been generated due to the reduction in usage and size of Towel Packs.

\[
\begin{align*}
3,250 & \quad 25\% \text{ of surgical procedures done annually} \\
\times \quad $1.25 & \quad 4\text{-Towel Pack cost at St. Luke’s} \\
$4,062.50 & \quad \text{Current cost incurred}
\end{align*}
\]

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANNUAL EXPENDITURE FOR EXCESSIVE TOWEL USAGE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Former Practice:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Item</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-Towel Pack</td>
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<td>4-Towel Pack</td>
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<table>
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<th>SUMMARY:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Former Practice Annual Expenditure         $20,800.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Current Practice Annual Expenditure         $4,062.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Annual Savings                        $16,737.50</td>
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