Case Study

Title: The Formula for Reducing Laundry/Linen Costs

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OBJECTIVE

An 800+ bed Medical Center located in the Southeast initiated major facility expansions and construction projects. The Linen Team responded by implementing linen management initiatives that were designed to address logistics/distribution issues in order to maintain service levels.

The Linen Team conducted a comprehensive facility audit in order to identify service level improvement and cost savings opportunities. Following the audit, the team evaluated the findings from the assessment and utilized this information to establish goals and objectives for the coming year. Linen utilization was identified as a key area for cost savings and the team agreed to focus on linen utilization as a major objective in the coming year.

STRATEGY

The Linen Team discussed factors that impact linen utilization practices on the floors. One of the main factors was nursing staff’s confidence that they will have the linen they need to provide quality patient care. In order to increase nursing staff’s confidence in the linen system, focus was placed on implementing linen management tools that targeted the six fundamental goals of an effective linen management system. These six goals include:

- Providing the Right Product
- At the Right Quantity
- At the Right Time
- In the Right Location
- Utilizing the Right People
- At the Most Effective Price.

The Medical Center, its Laundry, and Standard Textile partnered to plan and implement annual linen inventories. A “site captain” was selected to organize the project. The site captain’s role was to communicate the implementation plan, distribute the inventory forms and manage the counting process. The team decided to conduct the inventory at 6:00 a.m. on a Wednesday, as they believed this was the optimal time to conduct the count.
The Medical Center recruited nursing staff to perform inventory counts on the floors. There is a direct correlation between the timing of the inventory count and the accuracy of the data collected. The team provided an incentive to motivate nursing staff to complete and submit their inventory forms in a timely fashion. The team communicated to end-users that they would deliver the unit’s clean linen cart only upon receipt of a completed inventory form. This strategy proved to be effective as the team received 95% of the inventory forms by 9:30 a.m. the day of the inventory.

Upon completion of the inventory, Laundry personnel input the inventory data into the ControlTex® Linen Management System along with linen injections and discards. The laundry utilized this information to develop and refine their planned purchasing program. This initiative enabled the facility to maximize quantities of linen in circulation and balance the supply and demand for linen at the facility.

The team addressed the goals of “Right Time” and “Right Location” by reviewing the current clean linen delivery schedule, revising it, and publicizing the updated schedule to nursing staff. Additionally, the Environmental Services team installed sensors in the soiled linen chute rooms to detect when the chutes became clogged with linen. When the chutes became inoperable, the sensor sent a page to the linen distribution team’s pagers notifying them that the chutes were full. This technology helped the team to improve the soiled linen collection process.

When the team revised the linen distribution schedule, they shifted many of the clean linen deliveries from first shift to third shift in response to limited elevator accessibility and overall activity in the hospital during first shift. The increased workload on third shift created a need to shift staffing resources to handle these additional tasks. The linen distribution team shifted their staffing schedule to address the “Right People” goal, and as a result, they were better able to manage the linen distribution process during third shift.

After the team implemented these initiatives, they began to review, assess and implement communications programs related to linen utilization practices. The Medical Center’s Linen Team utilized a variety of educational tools as a vehicle for communicating with nursing staff. These educational tools included:

- Conducting an annual linen awareness event in the cafeteria. The team wanted to make this program interactive, so they incorporated the Service Quality Survey into the event. The team requested that participants complete a survey and in return, they were registered in the raffle. The raffle prizes included a luxurious bath robe and several bath sheet sets.

- As a follow-up to the linen awareness event, the team published the names of the prize winners along with some tips for best linen management practices in the facility newsletter. Every employee had access to this newsletter and thus, it was a good platform for communicating best linen management practice information.

- Meeting on a monthly basis, the Medical Center has a very active Linen Team comprised of representatives from high volume linen-using departments including: Nursing Administration, OR, ED and Pediatrics. The team plans and executes various linen management initiatives and these representatives regularly provide updates to their staff on the initiatives. Additionally, they obtain feedback from their staff on various issues and bring these questions or issues to the team for review and discussion.
During a committee meeting, the team discussed utilizing a targeted approach to communicate information on best linen management practices. The team brainstormed end-user roles and responsibilities in the linen flow cycle. They identified nursing assistants as one of the primary linen users throughout the facility and believed this group would be valuable to target. The team identified nursing assistants who were “informal” leaders in their departments. They recruited these employees to attend a Lunch & Learn About Linen Educational Program.

The team designed the Lunch & Learn Program to be highly interactive, fun, and educational. The team presented information on best linen management practices, provided a nice lunch, and developed a “Linen Management Jeopardy” game. They limited group size to 15-20 participants in order to encourage participation. At the conclusion of the event, the team encouraged these “informal” leaders to take this information back to their units and share it with their co-workers. Following the event, the team received requests from other nursing assistants asking if they could attend in the future. The team is planning to hold follow-up events.

RESULTS

As a result of the systematic implementation and management of these process improvement initiatives, the Medical Center was able to reduce the Pounds Per Patient Day Key Performance Indicator by 3.07. This resulted in a cost savings for the facility of $199,304.

CONCLUSION

By focusing on addressing the six fundamental goals of an effective linen management system, this Medical Center’s Linen Team was able to increase nursing staff’s confidence in the linen system. In response, the facility clinical staff reduced their linen utilization, which resulted in a cost savings for the medical center.