

CREATING LEADERS ON THE FRONTLINE

Exploring the New CHEST Program's Effectiveness, ROI, and Impact on the Profession

By Heather Williams

By now, we're sure you've heard the big news: Certified Healthcare Environmental Services Technician (CHEST) — the new certification program from the Association for the Healthcare Environment (AHE) for frontline environmental services workers — is officially rolled out, and soon hospitals across the nation will begin the very important and industry-changing work of offering classroom-style training that will transform the role of frontline environmental services technicians.

"It's time to take the reputation of the environmental services techs out of the dark ages," said Jim Henry, CHESP, director of Environmental Services at Texas Health Harris Methodist H.E.B. in Bedford, Texas. "They are not just 'housekeepers,' they are skilled professionals with training in higher-level personal protection equipment, proper handling of chemicals, bio-hazardous waste management, and disinfection techniques."

The new program is anticipated to change perceptions from 'housekeepers' sweeping and mopping floors to competent health care environmental services technicians who are able to provide a safe environment reducing the risks of health-care-associated infections (HAIs) and improving the patient experience.

"This program complements the CHESP [Certified Healthcare Environmental Services Professional] certification with a focus on developing the staff for succession planning," said Henry. "Having CHEST-certified staff members working at your facility will result in less turnover, improved employee engagement, improved customer and patient satisfaction scores, and reduced HAIs."

Progressing and Elevating the Profession

The important work of environmental services technicians has not gone unnoticed, which is why AHE and Clorox Healthcare have invested so much into frontline education in the new CHEST program.

"CHEST professionals are the future of our industry, and the CHEST program substantiates the importance of continuing education," said Henry.

Once an environmental services technician acquires the CHEST certification, they've proved their competency to customers, patients, peers, and their leadership team and earned recognition as a true professional. The program also provides a natural succession plan for organizations as well as presents the opportunity for CHEST-certified technicians to earn more income.



"The CHEST program is going to solidify and advance EVS technicians' positions on the patient care team," said Michael Bailey, CHESP director of Environmental Services at Greenville Health System in Greenville, South Carolina, and immediate past president of AHE. "Think about it: from physicians and nurses to respiratory therapists and patient transporters — all are certified individuals, so they're viewed as professionals," he said. "Now environmental services technicians have the same type of credential to demonstrate their expertise."

In addition to the credential and increasing competency, it's important to note the intangible return on investment as well. Bailey expects the program to increase staff engagement and improve retention. "It's going to be very difficult to get certified if you're not engaged," he said.

The new program allows environmental service directors to do a better job for their employees by providing them more opportunities to learn and develop themselves in their careers. "Here, we have a very thorough orientation package, but our orientation package only goes so far, and this classroom-based education with a certification focus is really going to get the attention of my staff," Bailey said.

The certification is something that is intended to go with employees as they progress in their careers and change jobs. "In the past, you work and move from one job to another, and you don't really have anything to show from the previous job," Bailey said. "This certification

is something that they'll be able to take with them and put on their resume or add to an application as they move on."

Contributing to Better Patient Outcomes

The CHEST program's impact on a more engaged and highly skilled workforce is expected to have far-reaching results on the health care system at large. A more engaged and skilled team results in more satisfied patients, which equates to improved patient satisfaction scores and increased reimbursements.

"Yes, I'll get better patient outcomes if my staff has been operationally trained on how to properly clean and disinfect a room," Bailey said. "But costs should and will decrease because of a reduction in HAIs, and our HCAHPS scores and customer service indicators should increase based on the behavior-based aspect of the program."

Calculating the Investment

CHEST certification indicates that an employee has been recognized by (AHE) as a professional in providing a sanitary and safe health care environment. As in any transformation and progression of this caliber, there is an expectation of cost in time and money. So how should an environmental services director justify the expenditure when talking to upper-level administrators? It's important to talk specifically about data and numbers, and to convey that the program is about so much more than teaching "how to clean."

"When trying to get buy-in for the program, I think having discussions and literature demonstrating the importance of being able to show the curriculum is very important," Bailey said. "[Administrators] have to know that this isn't just an operations-based test — it's beyond that.

It's important to crunch the numbers and take all aspects of the program's impact into account. Consider reduction in staff turnover and how this will save money in recruiting, interviewing, hiring, and training staff, and how this alone could potentially be enough to cover the investment in the program.

"Within the first three months, I anticipate a reduction of turnover by 25 percent over previous years," Henry said. "And within the first year, this program will pay for itself as it will reduce our expenses by \$13,718."

Long-Term Effects

With the changing health care landscape, it's become apparent that environmental services technicians on the frontlines serve as the one of the strongest links in mitigating risks in infection control, keeping patients safe, and decreasing the direct medical costs of HAI to U.S. hospitals, which ranges from \$35.7 billion to \$45 billion annually.

"With the growing challenges facing our country's health care facilities today, I would be comforted in knowing that my loved ones are being cared for by an organization that has proven CHESP leaders and CHEST technicians trained in their profession to maintain a clean and safe environment," Henry said.

Those involved in the program's development are confident it will reduce turnover, increase employee engagement, have a stronger positive impact on patient satisfaction scores, and convey to teams that their continued education and development in their field is valued.

"I've been involved with AHE for about 20 years, and I've served on the board and have been a part of exciting things, but this is quite honestly the most exciting thing we've developed yet," Bailey said. "It's all about staff development and making people better tomorrow than they were today."

Many environmental services directors might admit they didn't choose to enter this field, and it instead chose them. But to stay in a field that 'chose you' validates an exceptional amount of passion for the life-changing work that is done every day. "With this new frontline education program, we can take this passion that we have as leaders in our facilities and trickle that down to our staff," Bailey concluded. ●

Heather Williams is the editor of EXPLORE magazine and works with many of the American Hospital Association's personal membership groups to create member communications products.

BECOME A TRAINER!

There will be three AHE CHEST Train-the-Trainer workshops held in 2015. Visit www.ahe.org to learn more and register.

EVENT	DATE
Exchange Pre-Conference Workshop: AHE 2015 CHEST Train the Trainer Gaylord Texan Hotel and Convention Center, Grapevine, TX	September 17–19
AHE October 2015 CHEST Train the Trainer Baltimore, MD	October 13–15
AHE November 2015 CHEST Train the Trainer Long Beach, CA	November 3–5

TRAINER TYPE	AHE STATUS	PRICE
Facility Employee: Applies to individuals who work directly for a health care organization which delivers direct patient or resident care	Member	\$950
Facility Employee: Applies to individuals who work directly for a health care organization which delivers direct patient or resident care	Non-member	\$1,150
Consultant/Independent Contractor: Applies to individuals who work directly or indirectly on a contract basis for a health care organization which delivers direct patient/resident care.	Member	\$2,000
Consultant/Independent Contractor: Applies to individuals who work directly or indirectly on a contract basis for a health care organization which delivers direct patient/resident care.	Non-member	\$2,500