LEVERAGE AND MAXIMIZE

Utilizing Technology to Provide Better Outcomes

By Tamara Almquist

When I meet with front-line employees, I tell them, "You matter to this organization. What you do here is not clean rooms, strip floors and turn beds. What you do here is save lives."

While it has been a long time that we've been saving lives in health care, we've just begun to scratch the surface of utilizing technology to most effectively provide services that we're being counted on for. So what type of technology is out there to help Environmental Services (EVS) save lives?

Adjunct disinfectant robots

There are several different machines available that offer an added level of disinfection. Hydrogen peroxide or peracetic acid room foggers, and ultraviolet light are some of the most used sources of adjunct disinfection technology. Your staff does their normal clean, and then the machine gives an added level of comfort that the room has been properly disinfected. With additional but minor room preparation, roll this equipment into an empty patient room, turn it on, and it disinfects the room. To learn more about this technology, see 'Supplemental Ultraviolet Light Technologies' on page 14.

Bed management systems

With a bed management system, your staff is accountable for their response times and clean times of discharge beds. Staff carry pagers, iPads or cell phones that notify when patients are discharged or transferred and the room is ready to be cleaned. Since so much information is captured in this system, you can run all types of data reports and see activities in real time. This technology must be utilized by several different departments to be meaningful. If your facility does not currently use a bed management system, I strongly suggest you conduct the investigative legwork and present the business case to executive management.

RFID inventory

How much money are you spending on mops and cleaning cloths, and where are they going? If you employ RFID (radio-frequency identification) for EVS inventory management, or rent supplies from a company using RFID inventory control, you are well positioned to better control your supply budget.
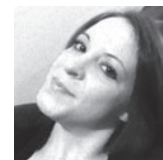
RFID allows an object's barcode to be scanned and recorded in a database. At the beginning of the shift, a supervisor issues a supply amount to each employee. Supplies are scanned out of inventory, then at the end of each employee's shift, the employee is responsible for returning the amount to you. Some rental programs even have a self-serve check-out and check-in inventory system.

EVS management software

There are a few companies that provide software to help manage productivity in EVS; each offering various levels and options. Some of the similarities and benefits of EVS management software include electronic space inventory; maintaining employee schedules; creating assignments and tasks based on square footage and cleaning frequencies; and providing staffing reports. Some EVS management software allows you to input inspection data and generate reports for Infection Control and PI Committees.

In a time of great change for health care – particularly in EVS – we need to stay one step ahead by knowing the answers to the questions we'll be asked, understanding how to track and maintain productivity and efficiencies all while providing the best atmosphere and experience for our patients, visitors and staff. Utilizing technology to leverage and maximize staff time and skills sets will help. ●

Tamara Almquist *is the senior director of environmental and surgical cleaning services for Geisinger Health System. Since obtaining her BS in Biology, she has been with Geisinger in multiple roles since 2006. In 2012, Geisinger received the ES Dept. of the Year Certificate of Merit from AHE, and in 2013, the Geisinger Medical Center Campus received the ES Department of the Year award.*