

Comprehensive Training Program

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Fellow Essay

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Abstract

The days of clean, shiny floors being Environmental Services' number one priority are long gone. Our departments have evolved and our role has become exceedingly more complex. As health care professionals, we are facing new challenges and responsibilities as our industry adapts to changes in the economy and health care reform. Whether or not we are successful as managers will be determined by administrative support as well as the staff's knowledge and understanding of their duties and responsibilities. Training must begin when a new staff member walks through the door and should follow them their entire career. A comprehensive and regulatory compliant training program begins with hospital and departmental orientation, and continues with regular departmental meetings and in-services, with meaningful annual reviews rounding out the program and adding to the communication process. The program is enhanced and fine-tuned through management rounds and in-depth inspections by supervisors who are competent in their own right and who support the program. Objective, clear feedback provides the staff operational transparency and should corrective action be required coaching, retraining and counseling occurs prior to punitive disciplinary action. A planned and well-thought out comprehensive training program is essential and must have the resources and support from all levels within the facility in order to be successful.

Health care professionals at every level realize the importance of a planned and well-

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thought out comprehensive training program. Training is at the very heart of every successful department. The true success of any program lies on the commitment by senior management, the department director and supervisors. Senior management and directors must be willing to allocate time and resources to enable programs to be well-run. Collaboration between directors and supervisors must be established and maintained.

The director of Environmental Services (ES) must engage senior management in the education progress of the department by actively being involved with many different initiatives, meetings and groups. The director should meet with the senior management in charge of operations on a regular basis (bi-weekly is suggested if time permits), discussing accomplishments, improvement plans, future growth, daily operating and budget analysis.

Specific (The Joint Commission [TJC], 2015) standards require that hospitals provide orientation to staff and document that the staff participates in ongoing education and training, and that as the hospitals evaluate staff performance and competency. A comprehensive training program should include new employee hospital orientation, departmental orientation, departmental policies and protocols, on the job training, in-service meetings, daily huddles, supervisory training, competencies, annual evaluations, inspections and facility rounds.

The scope and depth of your facility's new employee hospital orientation program will depend on the size of your facility and the resources allotted. New employee orientation meetings may be scheduled as often as monthly depending on the size of the organization. When possible, employees should be scheduled prior to starting. These orientations are usually coordinated and scheduled by Human Resources.

In contrast to the new employee's hospital orientation, which gives a broad picture of the facility, the departmental orientation should focus on the particulars of your department's

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operation. In order to ensure a complete, in-depth, and consistent overview of your department to each new employee, a standardized presentation should be developed and utilized. Presentations can be in-person, or take the form of video, audio tape or printed information packets.

Lasting success can be found by efficiently utilizing an information booklet. So much information is thrown at the new employee during their first few weeks on the job, it is impossible for them to remember everything. Later, employees can refer back to the booklet as a reference guide throughout their tenure.

The back sheet of the information booklet should be a receipt page. The sheet should contain the following brief statement: *I have been instructed and have received the following Environmental Services' information.* The form should include a place for the employee's signature and the date. After it is signed, the back page is removed and placed in the employee's file.

When introducing the booklets, hold a departmental in-service meeting, to distribute and review the orientation booklet. This way everyone, no matter how long an employee has been with the department or the facility, is equipped with the same information.

The orientation process may include both classroom instruction and planned on-the-job training conducted by the qualified individuals according to the established curriculum or course outline. The orientation period for those new to the facility is usually 90 days depending on their individual needs and the complexity of the new role.

One of the most effective methods for communicating information has always been the departmental in-service meeting. Today, most facilities now rely on computer-based programs (i.e.: Health-Stream, Net Learning, E-Learning IT) where all employees review introductory material upon hire and complete job-specific modules on an annual basis thereafter. These

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programs are equipped with pre-tests and post-tests to ensure the level of competency. Having the burden of completing mandatory education removed from the monthly department meetings, our concentration can then be focused on current educational needs.

The true success of any in-service program lies within the presentation. It is necessary to draw the audience in, making interplay paramount. The more participation solicited from the audience, the better the in-service will be. The most boring thing in the world is to have someone talk at you for an extended period of time. Make the group feel they are involved in a conversation. Maintain eye contact and talk to them. Draw your audience in by asking questions that require more than a yes or no response. This type of feedback will also let you know if you are getting your point across. Listen when the audience is speaking, respond directly to their questions and comments. Once you discount something a member of the group says as unimportant or trite, you will not only lose that person, but you will also lose the rest of the audience. A training program is a communication vehicle. Communicating is simply sending out a message, receiving feed back, then interpreting the feedback and responding.

The message we're sending is the when, what, where, how and why of our operation, which serves as the foundation for transparency. It starts with general and departmental orientation, and then continues with in-service meetings. The feedback comes by way of supervisory inspections and facility rounds. Our response--depending on our interpretation of the inspections and rounds--could be changes or additions to the ongoing education/training programs, implementation of new or revised policies/procedures, staffing pattern changes, equipment changes, and changes to counseling/discipline.

Throughout the education/training program, promoting an atmosphere of trust is paramount particularly for the ES Management team to foster the staff's understanding of why

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we are here. Instilling the attitude of “ownership” toward the facility and staff assignments must be at the forefront of our thinking. It is important that staff understands that they are key when it comes to the controlling of Hospital Acquired Infections (HAI’s), it also gives them a clear understanding and sense of importance for their work. Training and improvement must be continuous and ongoing.

Instituting daily huddles for all shifts can prove to be a huge success in keeping the lines of communication open and eliminating incorrect information from being heard “through the grapevine”. Finding an opportune time for these meetings can prove challenging. However, taking ten to fifteen minutes each day (prior to taking a scheduled break) to discuss current initiatives while giving staff the opportunity to talk about issues going on in their areas can be very beneficial.

Monthly staff meetings should be a time to celebrate accomplishments and an opportunity for all staff to hear consistent messaging, particularly those working on different shifts. These meetings should be a time to discuss and promote the efforts achieved during the last month and plan for the upcoming month. The team should utilize these meetings to air real issues that may exist between the shifts and encourage brainstorming for solutions without finger pointing.

Supervisors have to be competent and able to reinforce your program and goals. Every day, on the floors, your supervisory staff must follow up and support the direction you have laid out in your in-service and training programs. It is management’s obligation that they acquire the skills necessary to coach and reinforce the efforts of the employees in their charge. A department-wide program cannot be successful until a commitment is obtained from the entire supervisory staff. It is imperative that all of our supervisors have the ability to reinforce our

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program daily. Additional training for our supervisory staff must be provided in order to make this possible.

Supervisors are one of the most important management tools we have. If you were able to be everywhere at once, your supervisors wouldn't be necessary. It is imperative that your supervisors work as efficiently and effectively as possible. Supervisors are an important extension of every manager and department head. Throughout our facility they reflect who we are as a department and transparency of motives must be maintained.

Provide your supervisory staff with uninterrupted time for training. Expend the same time and effort with your supervisory staff as you do preparing your in-service meetings for your line staff. The difference here is their training must be on a different level. Supervisors need leadership and motivational training. Let's not forget the value of informal meetings, regularly scheduled (weekly) meetings can even be accomplished over morning coffee. Here is where your transparency will allow your supervisors to be open and honest with staff. Let your supervisors know what's going on. Let them know what direction the facility and the department is heading.

Presently, in many of our institutions, a major hurdle to overcome is the fact that a good many of today's supervisors were yesterday's line staff. In the past, a worker who was cooperative and proficient at his or her duties was considered a likely candidate for the job of supervisor. Doing one's job well does not automatically mean that they can do another, more complicated job. Dr. Laurence J. Peter (1969) wrote, "In a hierarchy every employee tends to rise to his level of incompetency." Peter further reports, "...The employee had been promoted from a position of competency to a position of incompetence. I saw that, sooner or later, this could happen to every employee in every hierarchy." It is our responsibility to prove Peter wrong. That can only come about if we properly educate, train, and mold prospective and new

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supervisors, so that they can be successful in their jobs. I believe that people should have the opportunity to be promoted up through the ranks, as long as bringing them through the ranks means training, nurturing, and completely familiarizing them with their new duties and responsibilities. Once you've thrown someone into a position without proper training, you have in effect thrown them to the wolves, and their success would become a difficult task to accomplish. There is an enormous amount of peer pressure which must be faced when one is promoted up through the ranks. If you add to this inadequate training the stress of trying to do well on a new job, the mental overload and burnout will surely take its toll on your new supervisor.

Previously, training for all those in the ES department was limited to basic cleaning techniques, fire safety and patient bill of rights. Now, our expertise must extend to infection control, chemical usage, medical waste handling, HIPPA and much more. New laws and regulations are constantly being enacted and all of us, from senior management to environmental services worker, must be aware of the ramifications of our actions, otherwise suffer possible civil or criminal charges.

We can benefit greatly by employing training programs to supplement our department's training initiatives. AHE's Certified Health Care Environmental Services Technicians (CHEST) Train-the-trainer program is described as a "Comprehensive training and certification program professionally designed and weighted to address the essential and evolving job tasks and requisite skills and knowledge of healthcare environmental services technicians." according to the CHEST brochure "Prepared for the Frontline." Programs, workshops, and certificates (i.e. IEHA Frontline, Buckeye Honors Custodial Training Program and Sonic Train) can be extremely valuable tools.

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Competency assessment and validation of the employee's ability/knowledge to perform their departmental and job specific duties will be determined by the director and/or the supervisor or designee, prior to the end of the orientation period. This competency assessment is documented on the Competency Criteria form.

Annual reviews and updates of the departmental education and training program will be based on assessed needs. The following chart is a (partial sample) list of Competency Criteria and frequency of competency verification for Environmental Services assignments.

Frequency Grid:

COMPETENCY	Initial Competency Verification	Annual Verification	Low Volume Annually Verification
DISCHARGE CLEANING	✓		✓
DISCHARGE CLEANING LABOR & DELIVERY	✓		✓
WHIRLPOOL CLEANING	✓		✓
BIRTHING POOL CLEANING	✓		✓
DISASSEMBLING & DISINFECTING THE INCUBATOR	✓		✓
SOILED LINEN HANDLING	✓		✓
TRASH	✓		✓
BALING OPERATIONS: VERTICAL BALER	✓		✓
RMW (INFECTIOUS WASTE) HANDLING, PACKING & MANIFESTING	✓	✓	
SPILL RESPONSE	✓	✓	

Tasks which are low volume are tasks done infrequently by the staff member and require

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re-certification on an annual basis to ensure the competency of the skill set necessary to perform the identified task.

Levels of Competency include: Performs independently and able to train/coach others; performs independently; performs with assistance; and unable to perform. Standards are met through Direct Observation or Testing Oral/Written and documented on the Competency Criteria form.

All individuals with the Environmental Services Department who are assigned to another job within the department, or expected to assume or cover the job of another, will receive job specific training for that assignment. Competency is assessed and verified by the Director and/or the supervisor or designee, for all assignments.

The annual performance review, an excellent communication tool, has been misused for years. Criteria-based reviews have looked to score supervisors more on technical skills rather than important management skills and abilities in areas such as planning, supervision, training, and general departmental relations. The comments on an annual review should never be a surprise, it should be a summary and a reinforcement of coaching and conversations which have taken place all year.

Most of us are aware that all managers perform certain basic functions: planning, organizing, leading and controlling. Henri Fayol was a French industrialist who during the early 1900s wrote that all managers perform five functions of management: they plan, organize, command, coordinate, and control. It is not possible to perform our most basic of managerial functions unless we have an awareness of the condition of our facility. A combination of getting out from behind the desk, making rounds and having adequate tools to gauge the facility's conditions is crucial. Inspection reports should be a routine part of our duties and they should be

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clear, uncomplicated and simple to complete. It is a difficult enough task walking into a patient room to evaluate its condition without the burden of having a complicated report to complete.

There are a number of options including a simple form designed on your computer or an inspection program on a tablet or smart phone.

Employees can't do well if they don't know what is expected of them. It is wise to hold a departmental meeting with your entire staff prior to implementing your program. An annual meeting should be incorporated into your schedule of departmental in-service to review the department's Quality Improvement Inspection Program. In addition, a moment should be taken out from each monthly in-service or department meeting to review inspection averages and any trends that may be developing.

Staff must be made aware that when you or your supervisors are completing inspection reports, it is not a time for them to fear retribution. They will not be beaten over the heads with the inspections. The purpose of inspections is to improve the service and to ascertain where departmental weaknesses lie. Immediately after inspections are completed, they are to be discussed with the workers on that particular unit and deficiencies should be corrected as soon as possible and corrections noted. This is a time to celebrate successes and point out what's been done correctly. Covey & Merrill (2006) posited, "Create transparency, tell the truth in a way people can verify, get real and genuine. Be open and authentic. Err on the side of disclosure. Operate on the premise of 'What you see is what you get.' Don't have hidden agendas and don't hide information."

Going a step further, Environment of Care News (2011) reports a need for a two-tiered approach to environmental cleaning. Level I program includes a checklist of high-touch surfaces to be used when cleaning patient rooms, CDC Checklist (2011). Level II program, objective

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monitoring methods – direct observation, swab cultures, fluorescent gel, ATP system, and agar slide cultures – are used by an Environmental Services supervisors or Infection Preventionist evaluator or a joint IP/ES team to assess the thoroughness of environmental cleaning.

Tracking inspection findings will help to determine patterns of deficiencies that will result in the ability to draw conclusions and recommendations, this will help to implement changes or additions to the ongoing education/training programs; implementation of new or revised policies/procedures; staffing pattern changes; equipment changes, and counseling/discipline.

Unfortunately, there are employees who will not respond to gentle nudging. For those employees, stronger steps must be taken. Those steps take the form of progressive disciplinary action. Disciplinary action must be standardized. Each employee must be treated the same. Employees should be aware of the disciplinary procedures and the consequences of their actions. Individual facility policy and procedures for dealing with the subject of progressive disciplinary action will differ based upon past practices, bargaining agreements (if unions are involved), and administration's management style. Progressive disciplinary action means that the action taken is metered out in steps or levels. In most cases' discipline begins with a verbal warning.

As a manager, one must take care to thoroughly investigate all alleged occurrence of an employee violation of the facility's policy or procedures. All concerned should be interviewed to ensure that you understand and have a complete picture of what has happened. There is nothing that can destroy a manager's credibility than to be ignorant of the facts as they come to light during a grievance hearing. Be consistent in your documentation and when writing warning notices.

In a Just Culture, Training for Healthcare Management Training (2008) stresses

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answering five questions: What happened? What normally happens? What does procedure require? Why did it happen? How was the organization managing the risk? Employing the Just Culture Algorithm is intended to aid in determining the right course of action when an employee has made an error, drifted into an at-risk behavior, or has otherwise not met his obligation to the organization. Tools such as this algorithm provide a fair consistent method to evaluate behavior.

Coaching, retraining and counseling are all steps which should be taken first when dealing with problem behavior. Terminating employees should be the last resort. Terminating an employee can cause the facility great expense. Those expenses can include, but not limited to, legal fees (to defend a wrongful termination suit), advertising expense (want ads), administrative cost associated with new hires (interviews, paperwork, physical exams, background investigations), training costs, overtime to cover short staffing.

There must be room for advancement and furthering education. We must encourage at all levels to take advantage of all available opportunities for learning and development and provide for all employees: comprehensive and organized educational programs; continued education; leadership development; and tuition reimbursement.

The importance of education and training in health care cannot be over stated. Training has moved from the periphery of our concern to the very core of our responsibilities. It can no longer be relegated to a last minute task or hurried through. Our departments have evolved and our roll has become exceedingly more complex. As health care professionals, we are facing greater challenges and responsibilities as our industry adapts to changes in the economy and health care reform. A planned and well thought out comprehensive training program is essential and must have the resources and support from all levels within the facility in order to be successful.

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