

# AHE'S INTERNATIONAL

The Association for the Healthcare Environment's diverse membership includes environmental services professionals from many different backgrounds, including international members. Here, we feature three perspectives on the global scope of environmental services and what AHE has to offer for members in any country.



**NAZAR MASRY, CHESP,**  
T-CHEST  
VICE PRESIDENT  
HEALTHCARE & LAUNDRY  
OPERATIONS  
JOB OPTIONS INC.  
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

## Q. How did you first get started in environmental services, and how has your career progressed?

I first got started in environmental services in 2004, and it was purely by chance. I was employed as a banquet manager at a hotel in the LA airport when I had a conversation with one of my former peers who worked for Kaiser at the time. I told him that although I enjoyed my position, I believed that I was going through the motions and needed more of a challenge. He informed me that there was an opening for an environmental services manager at one of the Kaiser facilities in Los Angeles and that I should apply for it.

A few days later, I took his advice and submitted my resume and was called for an interview. Leaving was a difficult decision because I didn't have any healthcare experience, and in general, I just wasn't fond of being in hospitals after my dad passed away. Long story short, I ended up getting the job as a night environmental services manager and I haven't looked back since. Within three years I was promoted to director of environmental services. In 2009 I was recruited by my current employer, Job Options Inc., so I moved to San Diego to take over as the hospitals division director.

In my new role, I oversaw environmental services for the Naval Medical Center, San Diego, and the VA La Jolla. Two years later, we acquired two additional Army hospitals contracts in Ft. Benning, Georgia, and Ft. Irwin, California. Finally, most

recently in November of 2015 I was given the opportunity to manage our Laundry Division as well, and I was promoted to VP of Healthcare and Laundry Operations.

## Q. At what point did you decide to become a member of AHE, and why did you think membership would be valuable to you?

I became an AHE member in 2007 when I first was promoted to director of environmental services. Although I was a director, I believe I needed additional technical knowledge to manage an operation with excellence. I knew cleaning, but healthcare is so much more complex. I wanted to be able to speak the same language as the infection preventionists and ensure that I could make sound decisions based on concrete, evidence-based knowledge. I thought joining AHE would be valuable to me in achieving those goals.

## Q. How has AHE supported you in your professional efforts?

AHE has supported me tremendously in my professional efforts. It provided me with so many tools and resources within the education platform. Back then I paid for the education! Currently, AHE offers complimentary education to members through a variety of learning methods such as webinars, online courses and

# PRESENCE

classes at the annual conference. Further, AHE was a great resource during crisis situations such as the H1N1 outbreak and the more recent Ebola outbreak. They were quick to reach out to members to provide necessary and new resources on the proper precautionary procedures. They coordinated weekly, and more frequent, conference calls with members to update them on any new findings pertaining to the situations at hand. Further, I have learned a great deal from joining some of the AHE committees that work on identifying members' educational needs and providing them with the critical tools they can utilize to enhance their operation.

**Q. Are there any challenges that international environmental services professionals face that might differ from those of their U.S. counterparts?**

I can't speak from personal experience because I live in the U.S., but based on my interactions with international professionals during the conferences, I can tell they share the same or similar challenges as we do in the U.S., and they have shared that is why they too joined AHE, as there isn't an organization in that part of the world that can offer what AHE has to offer.

**Q. What would you say to environmental services professionals overseas who might be considering joining AHE?**

I would tell them what are you waiting for? I would urge them to join AHE if they want the knowledge, skills and tools to run a successful operation in a healthcare setting. If you want to be the best, then you have to learn from the best.

**TANNIA FIELDS**

QA/COR/LCL/RMW

LEAD QUALITY ASSURANCE INSPECTOR,  
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Landstuhl is the largest U.S. Army Medical Treatment Facility outside the U.S. with the greatest patient care mission in MEDCOM, and I'm proud to be part of it. As we say, "logistics leads the way." A hospital could not function without the environmental services branch.



**Q. How did you first get started in environmental services, and how has your career progressed?**

I started in March 2000 at the U.S. Army Hospital in Heidelberg, Germany as a quality assurance inspector. The Environmental Services Branch was staffed with a chief, one QA who taught me to become one, six courier drivers as well as six soldiers. Our facility had four ORs, ER, MBU, L&D, inpatient wards, SDS, as well as numerous clinics attached to the compound. We also had eight outlying clinics with a large radius covering more than 100 miles.

Within two years, my chief left and the current QA became the acting chief. The QA left and the remaining staff were running the environmental services branch. In 2003, we hired a new QA and shortly after that, we hired a new chief. In 2004, I became a Lead QA. Throughout the years, I worked hand in hand with my chief and in his absence was

the acting chief. I was promoted to assistant chief in 2010. My chief, due to closure of the Army bases in Heidelberg, left in 2011. I became the chief and then left in Dec 2012. I was sent out to the Air Force base and worked there from January 2013 to January 2015. Since February 2015, I am back with the Army as an LQA in the Environmental Services Branch at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany and work closely with the chief of the Environmental Services Branch. I am a Contracting Officer Representative for the environmental management contract as well as linen, regulated medical waste and the logo mat contracts.

**Q. At what point did you decide to become a member of AHE, and why did you think membership would be valuable to you?**

In 2005, my chief told me about AHE and advised me it would be beneficial to me because I would learn a lot. Membership is valuable to me. I am able attend courses to learn and expand my knowledge. I can build on my career and most importantly, I share the knowledge and information with my work environment.

**Q. Are you currently an AHE member and if yes, what prompted you to join an organization that is far from you geographically?**

Yes I am currently a member and have been since 2006. AHE collaborates with the Medical Command (MEDCOM) and our hospital is MEDCOM, so while we are international, the resources offered are really beneficial.

# AHE'S INTERNATIONAL PRESENCE

## TANNIA FIELDS

*continued*

### **Q. What do you enjoy most about your job?**

I am a people person. I love everything I do.

### **Q. What are the main challenges you face in your facility as an environmental services professional?**

The loss of linen, in particular hand towels.

### **Q. What do you consider your proudest accomplishment?**

Improving the linen inventories. I always believed I could make the necessary changes and never gave up, no matter how hard it was or will be.

### **Q. What would you say to other environmental services professionals in your country who might be considering joining AHE?**

Great choice. You won't regret it, and you'll see all the benefits AHE has to offer.

### **Q. Have you attended any of the Exchange conferences over the past few years or so? If yes, how was your experience compared to your expectations of the conference.**

Yes, I did. Every year from 2006 -2012, I was able to attend AHE. At all conferences, I had a great experience and took a lot back to share at work.

### **Q. How is AHE similar or different from organizations that offer education to environmental services leaders in the health-care environment?**

Here in Germany we don't have any other way of delivering education that is relevant to the U.S. side of the business.

### **Q. How has AHE helped you manage your department/organization, and what could be improved to further enhance your knowledge and skill level?**

Through AHE, I learned how to improve as a Contract Officer Representative for all contracts I manage.

### **Q. Do you think language might be a barrier to some of the professionals who would like to join AHE and benefit from the educational offerings?**

No, not at all unless you don't speak English. However, most if not all of the staff speak and write English on the bases.

## SAAD ALI ALQAHTANI

ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES QUALITY COORDINATOR/TRAINER  
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT  
KING FIASAL SPECIALIST HOSPITAL AND RESEARCH CENTRE  
RIYADH, KSA

### **Q. How did you first get started in environmental services, and how has your career progressed?**

I used to work in ambulance services as an EMT for three years. We used to deal with very sick patients as we were the first to respond to them. As healthcare providers, we learned that "your self-safety first"—not to become a second victim. This kind of thinking led me to think about prevention. Then, I started to read more about prevention, which led me to read about public health as the first step toward healthcare. I thought, this is what we should make an effort for rather than treating people after they become victims, which may or not work successfully. It was a big change for me.

### **Q. At what point did you decide to become a member of AHE, and why did you think membership would be valuable to you?**

I became an AHE member the first year I started to work in environmental services. I was searching a lot about environmental services to learn more information to build my new career. I found AHE the best resource that can help me to do so.

### **Q. What do you enjoy most about your job?**

The challenges. Every day, we have different challenges we have to deal with. In my country, many people lack the key knowledge of how important it is to clean and disinfect, especially in a healthcare setting. Even the healthcare providers don't fully understand the important role of environmental services technicians in the healthcare setting. They tend to look down on what they call "housekeepers," thinking they only deal with trash handling. But what makes it even worse is when you notice that the technicians themselves are not aware of the importance of their roles in the healthcare setting. We started a program to elevate the environmental services workers' awareness about the value of our roles, especially in the healthcare setting.

### **Q. What do you consider your proudest accomplishment?**

We started the training program from scratch for the environmental services technicians and supervisors. This program addresses the technical and behavioral challenges.

### **Q. Have you attended any of the Exchange conferences over the past few years or so? If yes, how was your experience compared to your expectations of the conference?**

Yes, for the first time in 2015. The conference was one of the best I have ever attended in several ways; the hospitality, welcoming, exchange of knowledge and hearing about the experiences from different hospitals all over the world. I and the colleagues I was traveling with had the opportunity to expand our knowledge through the presentations that were provided at the conference, as well as in the exhibits.

### **Q. How has AHE supported you in your professional efforts? How has membership in the association been useful to you?**

AHE provides helpful classes, articles, experience and networking. I've gotten to know many professionals in environmental services from different countries

through AHE, which gives a better chance to share and exchange information.

**Q. What special protocols do you take when cases of mets-coV, PRCV, MERS-CoV, other virus, or infectious diseases such as Cholera emerge?**

First, we work side by side with infection prevention to identify the type of pathogen, any necessary information, such as required PPE, if there is any recommendation to use different disinfectants, if a change is needed, or if we need to isolate patients in special areas with required transmission precautions signs.

We also provide presentations/announcements/meetings for all environmental services employees about the specific pathogen and illness to make them aware about it. We provide refresh training on PPE/hand hygiene, publish all information on our department education screen and we check for fit testing respirators as required.

Fourth, we use ATP to monitor cleaning quality in isolation areas or in special care areas with transmission based precautions.

**Q. What are some challenges you face specific to your region in regards to the environment of care?**

Awareness of the importance of protecting the care environment and the impact of the environment on health.

**Q. Where do your primary guideline/protocols and procedures come from?**

OSHA, CDC, ASHRAE

**Q. What would you say to other environmental services professionals in your country who might be considering joining AHE?**

Do not hesitate. AHE is one of your best steps toward advancing and enhancing your career. ●

“AHE provides helpful classes, articles, experience and networking. I’ve gotten to know many professionals in environmental services from different countries through AHE, which gives a better chance to share and exchange information.”

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