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THE CHANGING FACE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

The face of health care is changing—changing at a very fast pace. Hospitals are seeing a strong shift from inpatient care to outpatient care, patients are utilizing urgent care centers versus emergency rooms, and patients are qualifying as observation status versus inpatient status. This has all had a huge impact on hospital reimbursements. The change is happening at what seems like rapid speed. Health care professionals are experiencing unprecedented times, and we need to know how to survive in a climate we have never experienced before. What we all should realize is that it is not a phase we are going through; this is our new reality. We need to not only understand it and get used to it, but also prosper in it.

Roadblocks

Reimbursements are one of the greatest obstacles facing health care. Environmental Services (EVS) professionals need to have a clear understanding of how our profession ties into those reimbursements and how we can have a positive affect on them. EVS is a cost center for hospitals. We have an impact on the reimbursements from HCAHPS scores, but we also need to demonstrate our impact on reducing hospital acquired infections (HAIs). Some may refer to those costs as “soft costs,” but it’s money we lose when we have to spend it, and there is also a huge cost to the affected patient and their family.

EVS has to not only show value as a cost center, but I feel it has to constantly vie for its place in the “food chain.” Clinical staff is constantly stretched to meet the direct needs of the patients. Any of those “non-clinical” tasks that clinical staff have done in the past are slowly moving down on their priority list. In some cases, EVS is being asked to pick some of those up as additional tasks since we’re considered a support service.

Many of our EVS technicians have done the same job for 20+ years. To add to the challenge, many of our supervisory level professionals are not experienced at being change agents.

Breaking through the obstacles

How can EVS better impact the new world it is experiencing? Some of the obvious things: We can make sure the patients who do visit our hospitals and health care settings experience a clean environment and that their risk of acquiring an HAI is drastically reduced because our staff is proficient in the proper use of chemicals and cleaning of high-touch surfaces. We can strive on proper hand hygiene. If patients are utilizing urgent care centers more, then we need to ensure that the patients coming in the doors of the emergency room are taken care of promptly.

Demonstrate the way your team touches the environment. Hospital leaders may not be aware of the necessary tasks you may be doing that add value to the patient experience. Speak of it every chance you get.

As mentioned, these are unprecedented times. We need to redefine our value as EVS professionals. This may not be as easy as



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it sounds. Change to our routines is a challenge, but it is our new reality and we need to prepare our front line technicians. Work closely with your teams on their goals and how they are going to change in the future.

EVS resources

Education is more important than ever. EVS professionals need to saturate themselves in knowledge to lead the future. AHE's online learning platform, ENGAGE, is a tremendous resource. Encourage your team to join AHE's LinkedIn discussions. We are resources to each other. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone. Read articles and research what you don't know.

It is very important to familiarize yourself with the new technologies in EVS. A great way to do this is by attending EXCHANGE 2014, where you'll be able to learn about these latest technologies at the Healthcare Marketplace. Connect yourself with other AHE members—there are others in the EVS field who can offer you support or a resource to get where you need to go.

It is key to be familiar with the regulatory agencies that effect our professions, such as the Joint Commission and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Regulations change and we must stay relevant to our profession, but we also must be able to speak with knowledge behind us.

We need to change how we think and how we act as professionals. It is crucial to develop a roadmap from which your team can work. These resources can be a part of your team's roadmap. You need to be the GPS for your team and lead the way. ●