

What's in your trash?

The Problem

How many times a day do you throw something in the garbage or recycling bin? At Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center's Main campuses plus Research North produce 3,900 annual tons of waste. That is the equivalent of 12.8 lbs/patient, or 1290 lbs/Full Time Employee.

As an academic medical center and research facility, our mission is to prevent disease and improve both individual and public health. One of our largest sources of waste is the production and disposal of single use or quickly obsolete hospital and research supplies. Their production and distribution contribute to disease proliferation by creating known toxins, carcinogens, and green-house gasses.

We have multiple competing interests where 1-3 can be at odds with #4:

1. The immediate medical needs of the patients in front of us
2. Infection control
3. Fiscal responsibility (space formerly used to reprocess had been converted to revenue generating spaces)
4. Disease prevention within the larger community

But what if you recycle some of these items? Won't that solve the problem? No.

Because so much of the waste comes from the production and transport of the items, recycling only addresses a small fraction of this problem.

The Goal

A 5% reduction in waste, adjusted for patient volume, by the end of FY2013. Each percentage = ~38 tons.

- Administrative/operations and auxiliary patient care supplies will be the preliminary focus.

The Team

- Environmental Sustainability Committee (26 members from 21 departments)
- VHA Team
- All BIDMC clinical and administrative staff

The Interventions

- Waste was measured and broken into 4 distinct categories: direct patient care, auxiliary patient care, administrative/operations and research.
- Possible opportunities identified for immediate action: patient foam cups and plastic pitchers, junk mail, Office Depot packaging, personal printers
- Currently working on a system to solicit input on reduction opportunities from individuals who have identified waste in their area.

The Results/Progress to Date



Reusable Sharps Containers

- Converted all disposable sharps containers to reusable (71 tons/year)
- Switched to reusable Hoya lift slings (4 tons/year)
- Reupholstered 100 exam tables instead of buying new ones (16.5 tons)
- Turned off daily Pathology Provider Audit Reports (~650/lbs/year)
- Began reprocessing medical devices this year. (<1 ton/year)
- Sized paper problem in an Ambulatory clinic

Lessons Learned

1. There are so many potential sources of waste, the problem can be overwhelming.
2. In most cases, change is difficult because:
 - Complex systems can be hard to understand because the people in them only understand their piece.
 - In some cases upgrades to major electronic infrastructure will be required.
 - We face space and labor constraints.

Next Steps/What Should Happen Next

- In line to be Office Depot's second site to eliminate delivery packaging materials
- We will be partnering with VHA to find waste reduction opportunities
- Will be examining the paper coming and going out of the medical center to identify reduction opportunities.
- A program will be launched to solicit input/identify waste reduction opportunities from around the medical center.



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