

Make it Easy to Be Green

Practical programs for greening your healthcare facility

By Wilf Prescott

What does the hospital of the future look like? Well, green, for starters.

It's no secret that hospitals have a significant ecological footprint. In fact, you may be familiar with the 2002 study of a hospital in British Columbia, which determined that it had an ecological footprint 739 times its actual size. To be clear, much of a hospital's reliance on water and energy resources is by necessity. However, hospitals can become a part of the sustainable healthcare movement while remaining focused on a bevy of other financial priorities.

As the Vice President of Operations for ARAMARK Healthcare Canada, I know that our hospital partners are faced with this dilemma. Fortunately, there are many opportunities to make changes in your hospital that can decrease its ecological footprint—important and valuable changes that can also:

- Increase sales within retail operations;



Aramark's Healthcare Canada's Environmental Stewardship Initiative earned a 2009 Waste Minimization Gold Award in Communications from the Recycling Council of Ontario. (L toR): Wilf Prescott, VP, Operations of Aramark Healthcare Canada; Jane Fountain, Environmental Services Program Manager and Steve Recchia, Environmental Technical Support for Senior Living.

- Enhance your reputation with the local community;
- Boost employee morale and retention; and
- Positively impact your bottom line through energy savings.

ARAMARK Healthcare has the ability to offer our healthcare partners a variety of programs that promote sustainability through environmentally-friendly products, sustainable food purchasing options, energy and water conservation efforts and waste management. However, what I've discovered is that greening your healthcare

environments is not only about the technological innovations that support water or energy reduction, but also the actual education of individuals who together have the ability to bring about monumental change in an organization.

This important discovery is what led to the creation of the ARAMARK Green Team Environmental Stewardship Initiative (ESI). Delivered largely through client sites across the country, this program is a broad-based and evolving environmental awareness communications platform. It is focused on engaging Canadian healthcare organizations to reduce their ecological

footprint. To accomplish this task the program provides a framework for hospitals to engage in meaningful environmental education and awareness initiatives.

Challenges

We knew from the outset that we would face several challenges in implementing this program. First, experience taught us that within the halls of healthcare, most staff simply do not have time or expertise to plan and implement events that draw attention to the growing number of environmental issues (recycling and waste disposal, energy efficiency, GHG reduction, water resource management, hazardous chemicals and toxic waste, wasteful food practices) impacting our planet.

We also knew that “one and done” programs would not result in the sort of long-term change we were seeking. Therefore, efforts needed to include repetitive messaging that could be reinforced through long-term programming. In addition, action messages needed to be continually and creatively reinforced over time in order to create sustainable and sound behavioural change.

A Solid Approach

Awareness of these two major challenges guided our team to develop a comprehensive program that includes easy-to-implement event management kits, creative communication materials and personal support.

The Green Team is constantly developing new and creative environmental stewardship event kits designed to emphasize the role of healthcare workers in supporting environmental initiatives. The kits also serve as a tool to incite action devoted to recycling and waste management, energy and water usage, and sustainable consumption. Kits are available to all of our healthcare partners for a nominal fee that covers production and distribution expenses. The events emphasize the importance of gaining a personal commitment from healthcare professionals and the general public. Each kit comes with detailed instructions on how and when to implement an event, the necessary materials, how to include senior management, and instructions

on the appropriate steps to take both before and after an event in an effort to get the most “bang for their buck.”

Debra Ireland, Food Service Director at Dryden Hospital comments, “Not only do these events help create awareness for customers and employees about how to become more environmentally-conscious, the events also consistently increase our food sales.”

The kit also contains all of the elements necessary to host a successful event including full-colour posters and handbills, targeted communiqués to senior healthcare leaders, staff and volunteers, survey ballots, as well as give-a-ways and prizes. Different environmentally-focused themes are targeted with each quarterly event kit, which have included International Earth Day, Energy Awareness Week, Sustainable Food, and Green Cleaning. The kit’s open framework makes it easy for participants to augment the basic programme components to create their own customized events by including local

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guest speakers, or partnering with local community-based environmental initiatives.

Ireland adds, “Employees are still talking about our event from last year, just as they are still turning their computers off at night and cleaning out their mugs each day for coffee. These changes not only positively impact the environment, but they also provide cost savings for the hospital. All because of the Green Team ESI.”

All kit materials printed and shipped directly to participating sites must meet the rigorous standards set out in ARAMARK’s Green Thread Environmental Policy, which stresses expanded use of electronic messaging versus print. Therefore, to reduce the ecological footprint of each event, the majority of event materials are made available in electronic format. When hard copy materials are necessary, recycled paper (100 percent post-consumer content recycled or Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) approved) and vegetable- and soy-based inks are used.

The Green Team also produces both internal and external environmentally-themed publications. Leaders In Action is

an e-newsletter sent bi-monthly to ARAMARK staff and provides best practices profiles, ESI event snapshots, requests-for-funding proposals, publication announcements, links to documents and online tools, and tips to become better environmental stewards. In addition to reinforcing environmentally responsible actions and praising best practices among local leaders, each issue also features a first-hand account of how environmental stewardship has personally impacted the lives of our executive guest writers.

Our quarterly Green Solutions newsletter is available via subscription to our hospital partners so that they can share it with clients, staff, volunteers and visitors. Each edition highlights one topic like Green Cleaning and then tackles that issue from a global, institutional and personal perspective. It provides hands-on tips, as well as resources available to make changes that positively impact the environment. The newsletter is written to incite thought and provoke actions. In fact, we often ask our readers to get involved by contacting politicians, merchants and other



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Building a better energy future

decision-makers to make their feelings known on many of the critical subjects we address.

“Hospital employees, patients and their families really do appreciate the newsletter and tip cards we make available to them,” says Jennifer Mercer, Food Service Director, Aberdeen Hospital. “They leave the hospital with tips on green cleaning and they know that ARAMARK and Aberdeen Hospital made that information available to them.”

Finally, we knew that it was crucial to provide personal support for those client sites interested in spearheading their own environmental stewardship initiatives. The last thing we wanted was for an event kit or newsletter subscription to go unused because a busy manager hit a roadblock to implementation. That is why we provided access to the Green Team through thegreenteam@aramark.ca. Team members will respond personally to any question related to environmental stewardship or the Team’s events and publications

“I let the Green Team know that each kit included significantly more materials than I needed,” adds Mercer. “Shortly after my feedback, they reduced the paper provided in each kit and made copies available electronically. It felt great to have my voice heard!”

Results

Our approach has been comprehensive to say the least and we are thrilled about the positive feedback we have received so far.


“With hospitals constantly looking for opportunities to reduce costs we can easily forget that conservation and waste reduction are important to our local and global community as well,” says Robert van Oort, Vice President, Planning, Support Services and Medical Affairs and Chief Privacy Officer, Dryden Regional Health Centre. “ARAMARK’s initiative in this area not only brought awareness to this issue, but gave our staff an incentive to participate.”

Many of our hospital partners have jumped at the opportunity to implement our new programming. To be specific, 159 event kits were ordered in 2008. These kits enabled our hospital partners to hold events highlighting Sustainable Foods, Energy Awareness Week, and International Earth Day.

We also experienced significant increases in event participation in 2009. This included a 217 percent increase in purchases of the Sustainable Food Services Week event kit, 197 percent increase for our Earth Week event kits and 131 percent increase for the Energy Awareness Week event kits.

Printing of Green Solutions has increased this past year from 2,500 copies to 3,200 copies, representing a 28 percent increase in subscribers. We also estimate, based upon feedback from participating client sites and colleagues, that well in excess of 160,000 clients, visitors, patients and residents, staff, students, executives and healthcare workers have potentially been impacted by our ESI and offered the opportunity to bring about more earth-friendly behaviour.

Finally, participation by non-healthcare units within ARAMARK’s client base, including schools, colleges and universities, and corporate accounts, added significantly to our outreach success. In fact, approximately ten higher education accounts across Canada, and approximately 20 private schools and 100 secondary schools (all in Ontario) participated in some or all of the past year’s events. In addition, partnering this past year with our internal corporate colleagues in Business Services and Education helped to significantly increase our outreach and impact.



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Success

“The Green Team ESI inspired us to pilot a program for recycling disposable gowns used in the operating room,” says Linda Orr, Operations Manager, St. Paul Hospital in Vancouver. “Doctors, nurses and other employees have been so excited to participate. After just a few weeks we have already experienced a 98 percent participation rate.”

These are achievements that we at ARAMARK are all very proud of, but we also look at our ESI as a starting point. There is much more work to be done to help our healthcare partners achieve their environmental goals in a way that makes sense for employees, patients, guests and their bottom line. Here’s a set of guidelines that we used to make our program successful.

Encourage and Obtain Senior Support

Moving a healthcare system in the right direction takes some very heavy lifting. Lifting can be made lighter

with the help of your hospital’s heavyweights—senior management. Healthcare employees need to see management setting an example and demonstrating not only their support of these initiatives, but also their passion.

K.I.S.S. (Keep it Simple and Specific)

Healthcare staff are stretched entirely too thin to spend time deciphering your materials. Therefore, programs should include very specific and easy-to-execute guidelines and materials. Not everyone feels comfortable knocking on the CEO’s door. Include instructions on how to gain management support and include a template for performing outreach.

Keep it Cheap

No one is immune to today’s financial realities. Make your program affordable and outline the many different ways that healthcare facilities can move towards a greener reality.

Keep it Green


Make sure your programs and materials are as green as possible. Otherwise, healthcare staff will question your purpose. Print on FSC-approved paper, use vegetable inks where possible or consider the use of electronic materials where appropriate.

Involve Employees and the Community-at-Large


Be sure to provide incentives that will encourage these two groups to participate in your events and capture their contact information for your e-newsletter. They will leave the events feeling good about what they have learned, the positive changes they can make in their own lives, and about your hospital for spearheading such an important cause. ■

Wilf Prescott is Vice President, Operations for ARAMARK Healthcare Canada.

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