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and the environment



The Valley Hospital  
System hives yield  
100 pounds of  
honey each year

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# A GREENER VALLEY HOSPITAL



A New Jersey health system is improving the environment — and its bottom line

When the The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood, New Jersey, began its quest to become an environmentally responsible healthcare organization, it first looked to its waste streams.

"We had many waste streams, such as municipal solid waste, regulated medical waste, sharps and many others," says Howard Halverson, director of environmental services at the not-for-profit facility. "In 2003, we began exploring sustainability initiatives with our vendors to counter these streams."

Thirteen years later, The Valley Hospital has recycling programs with 18 vendors and recycles batteries, light bulbs, paper, blue wrap, toner cartridges, carpeting, tiles, medical instruments, cooking grease, cardboard and textiles.





In addition to the environmental benefits, its green efforts have generated significant cost savings for the hospital, which is part of Valley Health System. For example:

- Educating staff about what is and isn't regulated medical waste helped reduce medical waste from 266 tons in 2009 to 111 tons in 2015, resulting in a reduction of \$77,500 in disposal costs.
- Reprocessing of single-use items such as scalpels and tourniquet cuffs reduced waste by six tons, generating a savings of \$41,000.
- Switching to a more efficient washing and disinfecting system for carts and surgical tables reduced related water use from 367,200 gallons to 79,200 gallons.

The Valley Hospital has also developed green standards across new construction/renovation and replacement projects that call for LED lighting, occupancy sensors for rooms, PVC-free doors made of engineered copolyester and low-VOC paints. There also are recycling collection cans in patient rooms, with custom stickers indicating which kinds of items to include in single-stream recycling. Nearly 90 percent of the hospital's construction and demolition debris is recycled.

## Give us your tired linens ... and more

Textiles play a large role in The Valley Hospital's sustainability efforts. In 2015, it donated three tons of textiles and, for its effort, received funds that it used for patient services. The program is simple, yet reflective of the hospital's forward-thinking, green mentality.

The textiles recycling effort started six years ago when Halverson made a

contact while attending a Northeast Recycling Council meeting. Through the council, he learned about the importance of textile recycling and met a representative of Green Tree, a charity that repurposes unwanted clothing and textiles for reuse by the poor and disadvantaged.

Seeing a win-win opportunity, Halverson requested an on-site Green Tree bin with regular pickup. Hospital staff fill the bin — situated in an employee garage — with retired hospital linens, as well as employee clothing, shoes, belts and even stuffed animals.

In addition to the bin program, The Valley Hospital switched from disposable hospital isolation gowns to reusable hospital isolation gowns in 2009, taking 63 tons of waste out of the waste stream and saving \$175,000 in the process.

## Greening the OR

The operating room (OR) presents a prime opportunity for healthcare facilities to reduce their environmental impact.

"Operating rooms are the largest users of supplies and, as a result, the largest generators of waste," says Hermine Levey Weston, RN, member engagement manager at Practice Greenhealth, a nonprofit membership organization that promotes and supports best environmental practices by healthcare organizations.

"For example, oftentimes hospitals will throw everything into the most conveniently placed containers for regulated medical waste, which has much

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higher disposal costs than municipal waste," Levey Weston says. "But when facilities such as The Valley Hospital properly sort waste like you would at home, the cost savings are significant."

Single-use items used in the operating room — including compression boots, scalpels and lancers — are being reprocessed by hospitals including The Valley Hospital.

"Such items are often thrown away after a single use, but they can be cleaned and sterilized, quality checked, repackaged and resold for the same use at half the original cost," she says.

Another OR-specific green practice involves creating less-waste operating kits.

"With prepackaged operating kits, some of the instruments and sponges aren't used, and those items often get tossed in the trash," Levey Weston says.

But facilities such as The Valley Hospital streamline prepackaged surgical kits that are routinely used during certain procedures.

"Hospitals doing this are saving money by not buying extra items that go unused, as well as achieving cost savings downstream through the waste disposal process," she says.

The Valley Hospital recently received Practice Green Health's Partner for Change Award for its overall environmental stewardship work and was specifically recognized for its OR efforts. The hospital also earned a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Recycling Award this year.

### Creating a buzz

Another important ingredient in The Valley Hospital's sustainability success is promoting healthy foods

Annually, the hives yield more than 100 pounds of honey which is sold in the hospital's cafeteria and used in menu items for patients, visitors and staff. Beeswax from the hives is used in the hospital's house-made lip and foot balms, body butters, hand lotions and vapor rubs.





## FEATURE



Electric car charging stations and clothing collection bins are part of the hospital's green efforts.



and healthy eating. One such effort has literally created a buzz at the hospital and The Robert and Audrey Luckow Pavilion, a satellite facility in nearby Paramus.

In 2013, Valley Health System worked with Bee Bold Apiaries to become New Jersey's first health-care organization to install beehives — four at the main campus in Ridgewood and four in Paramus. Annually, the hives yield more than 100 pounds of honey, which is sold in the hospital's cafeteria and used in

menu items for patients, visitors and staff. Beeswax from the hives is used in the hospital's house-made lip and foot balms, body butters, hand lotions and vapor rubs.

The beekeeping endeavor is in line with the health system's support of locally produced foods, which include produce and cage-free eggs, Halverson says. The hives also help with a widespread bee shortage by providing pollination for gardens, foliage and trees within a two-mile radius of the hospital and The Luckow Pavilion.

"As a healthcare organization, we are a leader in the community to promote healthy choices and sustainability efforts," Halverson says. "That's why we're always looking for ways to be ahead when it comes to

healthy eating, recycling practices, waste reduction, energy management and overall responsible ways of thinking about our environment."

### Growing greener

The Valley Hospital Green Team is engaged in an ongoing effort to seek opportunities to learn more about sustainability and educate hospital staff.

"We'll continue to promote the benefits of recycling and a healthier community, and we'll continue to take advantage of such opportunities as National Recycling Day, Earth Day and the hospital's safety fairs to create greater awareness," Halverson says.

Suppliers will also play an even greater role in the hospital's sustainability efforts moving forward. Using language that supports the use of both recycled packaging and recycled materials will become the norm.

"When you think of the tens of thousands of products that we must purchase to run a hospital, this is an enormous task," he says. "It's critical that we continue to have strong and sustaining procurement positions with our vendors." ■



**Howard H. Halverson is Director of Environmental Services at The Valley Hospital. Halverson is a member of the Occupational Health and Safety team, Agency Administration, the Hospitality Team and the Curriculum Team for Valley Health System Leadership Institute. He also leads The Valley Hospital Green Team and is coordinator for Practice Green Health Sustainable Reporting.**



## SPREADING THE WORD

Reston, Virginia-based Practice Greenhealth (PGH), a networking organization of more than 1,000 member hospitals — about 20 percent of the nation's total — is dedicated to promoting sustainable, eco-friendly practices in hospitals.

Recognizing that sustainable healthcare requires action plans, PGH provides members with access to experts in environmental preferential purchasing, healthy foods, safer chemicals and greening the operating room. Each member is also assigned an engagement manager to discuss environmental efforts, needed resources and ideas for green efforts.

Member engagement managers also provide Environmental Excellence Award applications for these PGH honors.

- Partner Recognition
- Partner for Change
- PVC- and DEHP-Free
- Greening the OR Recognition
- Making Medicine Mercury-Free

"Hospitals should be recognized for going above and beyond treating sick patients," says Member Engagement Manager Hermine Levey Weston, RN.

These demonstrate the seriousness of the work and the applicants' level of commitment. The application has 14 categories (waste, energy, water, chemicals, food, etc.), with about 60 questions per category. It can take hospital teams three months to complete.



"It's important for hospitals to practice sustainability and healthy practices, to use what they've learned to benefit their communities and to be recognized for their efforts," Levey Weston says. "We'd like to see more hospitals doing this important work, and we'd like to see them doing it as PGH members. If they do, they'll be more successful because they'll have access to valuable resources and benchmarking data, and they won't have to reinvent the wheel. That's my hope for the future."