

What Hospitals Want from Their Laundry (Part 2 of 2)



[Nancy Jenkins](#) | February 29, 2012

EVS managers, nurses and laundry operators share viewpoints on what clients want from healthcare linen providers

FAIRWAY, Kan. — In an effort to shed light on what hospitals want from their laundry providers (and, in doing so, provide intelligence to help providers meet healthcare client needs and expectations in 2012), a 360-degree review on the subject was in order.

In addition to interviews with environmental service (EVS) managers and nurses at a dozen hospitals across the country, about two dozen laundry operators were surveyed and interviewed.

While the nature of this review is anecdotal (i.e., not a scientific study), the feedback gathered resonates true.

What Laundry Operators Think They Want

Based on a survey of operators representing all sizes and types of laundry operations, they say hospitals want (in order of importance):

- On-time delivery and sufficient inventory
- Responsiveness to client needs and requests

- Good-quality products
- Competitive prices
- HLAC accreditation

While operators ranked HLAC accreditation low as a customer priority, most agree this is changing as more and more laundries become accredited.

The primary complaints received from clients are (in order of frequency):

- Costs too high
- Stains and tears on items
- Insufficient inventory
- Poor quality
- Lost or missing goods

There were many operator complaints about clients not taking the time to communicate needs, to understand pricing issues, or to participate in inventory control and loss programs.

Of those surveyed, 71% provide service on a rental basis, with the remaining 29% providing a combination of rental and customer-owned goods (COG). Ninety-three percent of all respondents provide clients education on linen use and control; 86% provide inventory management programs.

What Hospital EVS Managers Say

While some EVS managers might not rank having its laundry HLAC-accredited top of the list, it is a must-have criteria for others. “Our laundry provides excellent service and works closely with me and my administrator on any issues that arise,” says Kent Miller, CHESP, director of environmental services for Jackson Hospital & Clinic in Montgomery, Ala.

“I believe a healthcare laundry should be HLAC-accredited,” adds Miller, who is also president of the Association of the Healthcare Environment (AHE), an HLAC founder. “My laundry provider is accredited, and they made sure I received a copy of the accreditation certificate.”

When asked how their laundry provider could improve its service, EVS managers say they need:

- Better-quality goods/fewer stains
- Better communication on product changes and service options
- Help in enforcing appropriate linen usage among staff/controlling losses
- Training programs for staff in each unit (along with spot audits)

When asked what their laundry provider does right, EVS managers stated:

- On-time delivery
- Responsive to requests
- Good fill rates

Overall, the EVS managers interviewed were happy with their laundry providers. Those happiest with their service have a close relationship with a customer service representative from the laundry.

But one issue remains difficult to resolve.

“I have great laundry service, but the biggest gripe I get from staff is about stains on linen, especially on our knit sheets,” says Wes Thiss, CHESP, EVS director at St. Mary’s Hospital in Richmond, Va. “I realize that part

of the stain issue is our fault. The iodine cleanser commonly used in hospitals stains terribly. But the perception among staff is that if there is a stain, it's not clean."

The Nursing Perspective

Nurses want the linen they need right now. "If it has hair or a stain on it, we put it straight in the soil bin," says RN Copp.

In general, nurses say they need:

- Clean linen without stains, tears or holes
- Patient gowns with snaps that work
- An adequate supply of items
- A better understanding of their needs (listen to what they say and follow through!)
- An appointed hospital linen liaison or advocate for each unit

A survey taken of 42 nurses during a Practice Greenhealth webinar¹ in February 2011 revealed that 40% rated their laundry service as "good," 30% rated it as "fair," 20% rated it as "poor," and only 10% rated their laundry service as "great."

"In my 17 years as an RN and administrator, I have observed that most linen services do a decent job," says Brenda Willis, RN, Tonganoxie, Kan. "But if there is no one appointed on the unit floor to oversee linen use and advocate on behalf of the laundry, there are more problems and greater linen losses."

One nurse noted that staff hated getting patient gowns with snaps that didn't snap. Because the perception was that gowns with broken snaps kept being returned to them, nurses started throwing them away.

"The most common mistake operators make in serving hospitals is not communicating sufficiently with hospital staff," says Deborah Lark, COO of Portland Hospital Services Corp., Portland, Ore. "It's critical to communicate with and educate end-users about linen and the laundry operation."

"Unless we educate the end-user, there is a tendency for clients to take linen for granted. Hospital staff can wind up making assumptions about the laundry operation that result in unrealistic expectations."

The Challenge — Will You Meet It In 2012?

Does your laundry operation have customer service reps that regularly visit with the client contact and floor staff?

Do you provide training for staff on appropriate linen usage?

Do you insist that each hospital unit have an appointed linen advocate?

The successful execution of these tactics can make the difference between happy customers and your profitability in 2012.

But Thiss acknowledges that it's hard to get nurses to participate in any type of linen committee. "We need help getting our nurses to want to participate in training and committee work."

"The most important thing hospital staff can do is be open-minded and willing to form quality and linen committees that can then set realistic goals and par levels," says Kelly Jefferson, vice president of customer support services for Reino Linen Service, Gibsonburg, Ohio. "We also need to coax staff to talk openly about

fill rates and returns.

“Until you have a true relationship and partnership established between the laundry and end-users, there will always be questions of fill rates, quality, costs and customer satisfaction.”

1 Practice Greenhealth Webinar Series on Greening the OR. Session on "Increasing Use of Reusable Surgical Textiles to Reduce Waste and Costs, presented by the American Reusable Textile Association (ARTA)," Feb. 7, 2011. Forty-two webinar participants polled by Practice Greenhealth during webinar.

www.practicegreenhealth.org.

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