Objectives:
The Linen Committee was charged to establish and enforce linen management policies to improve efficiencies and reduce waste, and to incorporate sustainability principles, while maintaining patient-focused quality of care and safety.

Methods:
Baseline data was collected to understand linen categories (e.g., bed linens, towels, gowns, scrubs, etc.), and their replacement and laundering costs. Unit site visits were performed, and staff were surveyed to assess their understanding of linen management practices. Departmental policies on bedmaking and linen management were reviewed.

Results:
Cost and weight analyses for bed linen composition showed that two major items for potential reduction were incontinent pads and thermal blankets. Combined, those two items comprised almost 60% of total bed linen weight and 25% of the linen replacement budget.

Staff from 15 nursing units participated in a linen survey. Survey results indicated knowledge gaps in staff practices and that they would benefit from further educational outreach.

Action:
The Linen Committee recommended the following changes to improve linen efficiencies, which were included in the staff education campaign:

1. Eliminate daily linen change requirements;
2. Reduce use of incontinent pads and thermal blankets;
3. Refrain from bringing extra linen into patient rooms;
4. Promote linen reject bag usage to reduce linen waste.

Early Outcomes:
With implementation starting in July 2012, early results have demonstrated reduced linen replacement and laundering costs for bed linen. The education campaign has raised awareness on staff’s ability to support sustainability efforts without compromising the quality of patient care.

Staff Education Campaign:
Educational posters and inservices were provided for each nursing unit that participated in the linen survey. Individual unit results were shared with staff and posted in staff areas. New policy revisions and products were clearly outlined along with evidence to support each initiative. The campaign emphasized the financial, environmental, and safety reasons for the changes.

Lessons learned:
- Multi-disciplinary participation is key for an effective committee.
- Updates with nursing management council and senior leadership helped to refine recommendations and gain support.
- Vendor and product changes during process hindered data collection and assessment of outcomes, leading to greater challenges.
- Staff surveys helped gauge needs in training for the education campaign.
- Time and resource commitments are required for successful policy roll-out.

Future projects to support linen cost reduction and sustainability goals include:
- Washable surgical linens and warm-up jackets
- Scrub dispensers to reduce loss of scrubs
- Reject linen diversion from landfill

Questions? Ideas? email: Sustainability@ucdmc.ucdavis.edu