American Sustainable Business Council

Case Study

Pioneering a Healthy Approach to Safer Chemicals

"The internal business practices we've developed help reduce risks to our team members and patients, which helps our bottom line. And we advocate for policy change to ensure that all companies do their part to build a genuinely healthy community."

– Robert C. Garrett, co-CEO Hackensack Meridian Health

As a leading provider of health care and research, Hackensack University Medical Center (HackensackUMC), in collaboration with Deirdre Imus, is in a better position than most other businesses and organizations to clearly see the costly damage inflicted by toxic chemicals in our food, water, and consumer products. HackensackUMC is setting an example to address this with active in-house efforts and advocacy for legislation to curb toxic chemical use.The hospital's assessment is that meaningful regulations provide important safeguards, reduce avoidable costs and health impacts – and create both healthier communities and economic opportunities.

Protecting Patients and Employees from Toxins

HackensackUMC is on the front lines in applying health care research to facilities management practices. Overwhelming scientific evidence indicates that Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, learning and developmental disabilities, reproductive health and fertility problems, asthma, some types of cancer and other chronic diseases are linked to commonly used chemicals. Some 80,000 chemicals are on the market today, yet only five have been regulated.

HackensackUMC advocates for meaningful reform of the Toxic Substances Control Act to give all businesses current, scientific guidance to avoid perpetuating costly public health problems. Reform would update companies' understanding of toxic chemicals and safer alternatives and would prevent penalizing responsible corporate citizenship in the marketplace. In addition to supporting reform on a national level, HackensackUMC has been investing in research and procedure development to minimize risk in-house.

Hazardous Materials Policy

HackensackUMC recognizes the need for guidelines governing interior finishes, furnishings, cleaning products and other facility purchases to systematically minimize risk to patients, personnel, visitors and the community.

Researching Safer Alternatives

HackensackUMC research yields safer solutions to common public health needs. A recent study at HackensackUMC's Deirdre Imus Environmental Health Center (DIEHC) found that replacing pesticide-based lice treatments with dimethicone had a 98.3% success rate after one day, making it a better option for pediatric patients. Practical research like this has exciting public health implications.

HackensackUMC

HackensackUMC, a nonprofit teaching and research hospital located in Bergen County, NJ, is the largest provider of services in the state.

- Founded in 1888
- Ranked #1 in New Jersey by U.S. News & World Report's Best Hospitals 2015-16
- Named one of the top four New York metro area hospitals
- Flagship hospital of the Hackensack University Health Network
- 1,717 beds
- 3,300 physicians
- Over 10,000 team members

Advocating for Safer Chemical Policies

Knowing that updated chemical legislation is crucial to better public and economic health, HackensackUMC actively supports research-based policies and implementation, both in its in-house practices and on the national level. HackensackUMC advocates on Capitol Hill, and as a member of the American Sustainable Business Council (ASBC), it supports healthy chemical legislation. In line with its longstanding public health mission, HackensackUMC also trains team members on the Safer Chemicals program and provides leadership in Healthcare Without Harm and Practice Greenhealth to move the healthcare market toward safer products.

Addressing Chemical Challenges to Child Development

Recent research at The Deirdre Imus Environmental Health Center at HackensackUMC revealed detectable levels of environmental chemicals in a study of 50 healthy prepubescent patients. All of the patients tested positive for at least five endocrine-disrupting environmental chemicals and three-fourths of the patients tested positive for at least eight. The study, published in BMC Endocrine Disorders, has been used to educate the public about toxic exposures and children's health issues.

Addressing the growing incidence of autism, the DIEHC at HackensackUMC also published a CDC-funded research study, "Mapping Contaminants Associated with Autism: A Public Health Pilot in New Jersey," in the Journal of Geographic Information System. The study maps eight of the most prevalent toxins potentially linked to autism spectrum disorders.

Implementing Chemical Safety In-House

HackensackUMC has made crafting and implementing a safer chemicals policy an active priority in its own facility. Decision-making about chemical use is a standing agenda item at meetings to ensure that materials/products brought into the hospital do not pose a known threat to the health of patients, team members, and the community.

HackensackUMC's policy includes:

- Developing a practical system that identifies materials and products containing hazardous chemicals prior to purchase so that an informed decision can be made regarding possible alternatives.
- Purchasing materials and products that minimize risk of exposure to hazardous chemicals.
- Complying with Hazardous Materials Management Plan #H-01
- Informing all affected employees of the dangers of any hazardous materials and products used by the medical center in accordance with legal requirements.

HackensackUMC's leadership believes that healthcare institutions have a particular ethical responsibility to use clinical and non-clinical materials and products that pose less risk to human health. HackensackUMC is a leading example of the growing number of hospitals that are eliminating known and likely chemical hazards in favor of safer alternatives with equal or greater efficacy. Benefits of this switch include reduced disposal costs, lower liability, and a health-enhancing environment for patients, employees and the public. HackensackUMC believes that the more institutions, companies and organizations adopt safer chemical policies under updated regulation, the fewer incidents of preventable, high-cost chronic illness the U.S. economy will have to manage. These combined efforts will help prevent chronic illnesses and provide healthier environments for team members, patients and the greater community.

The American Sustainable Business Council *advocates for policy change and informs business owners and the public about the need and opportunities for building a vibrant, sustainable economy. Through its national member network, ASBC represents more than 200,000 businesses and more than 325,000 entrepreneurs, executives, managers and investors.*

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