

CREATING LEAD ON THE FRONTLINE

Exploring the New CHEST Program's Effectiveness, ROI, and Impact on the Profession

By Heather Williams

By now, we're sure you've heard the big news: Certified Healthcare Environmental Services Technician (CHEST), the new certification program from the Association for the Healthcare Environment (AHE) for frontline environmental services workers, is officially rolled out, and soon hospitals across the nation will begin the very important and industry-changing work of offering classroom-style training that will transform the role of frontline environmental services technicians.

“It's time to take the reputation of the environmental services techs out of the dark ages,” said Jim Henry, CHESP, director of Environmental Services at Texas Health Harris Methodist H.E.B. in Bedford, Texas. “They are not just housekeepers, they are skilled professionals with training in high-level personal protection equipment, proper handling of chemicals, bio-hazardous waste management, and disinfection techniques.”

The new program is anticipated to change perceptions from housekeepers sweeping and mopping floors to competent health care environmental services technicians who are able to provide a

is something that they'll be able to take with them and put on their resume or add to an application as they move on."

"Within the first three months, I anticipate a reduction of turnover by 25 percent over previous years," Henry said. "And within the first year, this program will pay for itself as it will reduce our expenses by \$13,718."

Contributing to Better Patient Outcomes

The CHEST program's impact on a more engaged and highly skilled workforce is expected to have far-reaching results on the health care system at large. A more engaged and skilled team results in more satisfied patients, which equates to improved patient satisfaction scores and increased reimbursements.

"Yes, I'll get better patient outcomes if my staff has been operationally trained on how to properly clean and disinfect a room," Bailey said. "But costs should and will decrease because of a reduction in HAIs, and our HCAHPS scores and customer service indicators should increase based on the behavior-based aspect of the program."

Long-Term Effects

With the changing health care landscape, it's become apparent that environmental services technicians on the frontlines serve as the one of the strongest links in mitigating risks in infection control, keeping patients safe, and decreasing the direct medical costs of HAI in U.S. hospitals, which ranges from \$35.7 billion to \$45 billion annually.

"With the growing challenges facing our country's health care facilities today, I would be comforted in knowing that my loved ones are being cared for by an organization that has proven CHESP leaders and CHEST technicians trained in their profession to maintain a clean and safe environment," Henry said.

Calculating the Investment

CHEST certification indicates that an employee has been recognized by (AHE) as a professional providing a sanitary and safe health care environment. As in any transformation and progression of this caliber, there is an expectation of cost in time and money. So how should an environmental services director justify the expenditure when talking to upper-level administrators? It's important to talk specifically about data and numbers, and to convey that the program is about so much more than teaching how to clean.

"When trying to get buy-in for the program, I think having discussions and literature demonstrating the importance of being able to show the curriculum is very important," Bailey said. "[Administrators] have to know that this isn't just an operations-based test, it's beyond that.

It's important to crunch the numbers and take all aspects of the program's impact into account. Consider reduction in staff turnover and how this will save money in recruiting, interviewing, hiring, and training staff, and how this alone could potentially be enough to cover the investment in the program.