Data Computes for Germ-Zapping Robots

When germ-zapping robots were first introduced at Unity Health in January 2017, the overseers of the Xenex program feared hesitancy to embrace it due to the fact that this step adds a minimum of 15 minutes to the cleaning process. However, once the numbers came back, no one had any doubts about it.

Unity Health infection preventionists Meghann Holmes and Samantha Green, who have been over the program since its beginning, said that it has succeeded because of teamwork.

"It takes everyone," Holmes said. "Environmental Services is the main component because they are the ones using them every day. I have been so impressed with their willingness and effort. I am so pleased that none of them seem to mind having an increase in their workload because they know they are making the hospital a safer place for our patients."

The goal of the Xenex Lightstrike Germ-Zapping Robot Program is to create an overall safer environment for not only the patients, but also family and loved ones who visit. These robots use a powerful pulsed xenon light to kill harmful viruses and bacteria that can cause health-care-associated infections such as methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), Clostridium difficile (C. diff) and the influenza virus.

Unity Health was the first hospital in the state to implement the program. It currently has germ-zapping robots in four nursing units and in the operating room. They are also used to disinfect additional work spaces like break rooms and medication rooms. The Infection Prevention and Environmental Services departments hope to eventually have a robot for each unit at the hospital.

Former Unity Health Chief Medical Officer Dr. John Henderson first saw the Xenex program elsewhere. He heard about the success had with it, then presented the program to Infection Prevention to get the department's take on the technology.

"Dr. Henderson was our champion and driving force for implementing the Xenex program," Holmes said. Holmes re-emphasized that successfully implementing the program would not have been possible without everyone being on board and doing their part — the nursing staff that manages timely discharges and troubleshooting, the biomed team that provides timely maintenance and ensures the robots are working correctly and the administration team that supports the implementation of the program.

The Infection Prevention department monitors all the data, including infection rates, robot usage and protocol compliance, which the department reports on monthly. This allows the department to see how many health-care-associated infections (HAIs) the hospital has decreased by.

Here are some of Unity Health's accomplishments with the Xenex program:
• 71 percent decrease in HAIs (December 2017-August 2018);
• Estimated over $700,000 in cost savings;
• 22 infection cases avoided in patient floor units;
• 7 infection cases avoided in the operating room;
• Unity Health's New Life Center and Observation unit have been recognized for 1,000 days with no HAIs;
• Steve Cooper, biomedical technician, named Xenex Technician of the Quarter.

The Xenex program is part of the Unity Health Foundation campaign Home is Where the Heart Is. Campaign funds help to provide new Xenex robots, Inpatient Physical Rehabilitation Center renovations and Patient Safe Handling Rooms. To learn more about the campaign or to donate, visit www.unity-health.org/foundation or call the Unity Health Foundation at (501) 278-3191.

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