



DHR first in RGV with xenon UV disinfection systems

Patients go to hospitals to be cured, but can pick up infections during their stay. Patients are prone to bacteria that can worsen their ailment or spread disease.

“Being at the hospital is a dangerous thing,” said Doctors Hospital at Renaissance executive physician of clinic operations, Dr. Gerardo Lopez-Mena. “We know that the number three cause of death in the United States is problems that occur because of errors in the hospitals or pharmacies — anything medical related.”

This is why DHR purchased seven disinfection systems that pulse ultraviolet light to kill bacteria, viruses, mold and fungi, making it the first healthcare system in the Rio Grande Valley with the technology.

The portable disinfection system is effective against the most dangerous pathogens, according to a news release.

The technology exists to prevent the bacteria from getting to the patients in the first place, said science director with Xenex Disinfection Services, Dr. Sarah Simmons.

“Sometimes they get really out of control. Surgical site infections, especially patients undergoing heart surgeries — or knees or hips,” Simmons said. “If those get infected, it could be hundreds of thousands of dollars to fix, and people can even lose mobility.”

UV light tech began in the 1970s to control tuberculosis, but the systems were installed into walls “We took that idea that put it on wheels to it can go to all kinds of rooms in the hospital,” Simmons said. “What’s also unique is that we use xenon to make our UV light. Everyone else on the market uses mercury lamps to make UV.”

Xenon disinfects rooms are nearly 10 times faster than other systems, she said. The lights are also green and nontoxic.

“This is the latest and greatest in hospital cleaning,” Simmons said. “This product costs \$100,000. But the way hospitals think about that is two or three infections prevented. So each robot pays for itself essentially in a matter of months.”

The disinfectant systems work complementary to existing housekeeping services. Portable units are placed in different spots of a room, and the bulb slowly rises and lowers to change the angle of light.

“UV light casts a shadow in the room the same way sunlight casts a shadow,” Simmons said. “There are going to be limitations in any technology, our focus is on the high-touch surfaces (like bed rails and over-bed tables — things that are out and will see the lights”

The system was introduced by DHR infection control director Mary Lou Love, who also serves at the local-chapter president of Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology. She came across the tech at an APIC conference, and thought the system of “one of a kind” after researching alternatives.

The evidence of the system’s prevention of infection was pivotal in the push for the purchase, officials said.

“It’s well worth it,” Lopez-Mena said. “At the end of the day, we’re talking about reducing the number of infections for our patients.”

As just a single doctor, Lopez-Mena said, he can only see so many patients. But if they utilize cutting-edge evidence-based tech, the research can be amplified, he said.

Lopez-Mena said his employer’s support makes him feel like he could be a part of medical solutions.

“At the end of the day, we have a system that is not sustainable,” Lopez-Mena said. “When you work for an organization like this, you can think outside the box.”

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