Reducing the healthcare environmental footprint

Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service (SCHHS) is working hard to reduce the environmental impact the service has, with dozens of initiatives underway and many more planned for 2020.

It is estimated that the carbon footprint attributed to the health industry is about 7 per cent of Australia’s total.

Dr Morné Terblanche, Medical Lead, Safety Quality and Innovation, said hospitals are highly energy intensive, consume large amounts of resources and produce a large amount of waste.

“So much that comes into patient contact is routinely used only once due to patient safety and cost.

“Here at SCHHS, we’ve been looking to other health care organisations and categories globally to find innovative ways to reduce energy use and waste.

“One thing we noted was the importance of having people to lead the charge and rally staff involvement.

“At SCHHS we have Recycling Champions, like Dr Stacey Swinkels, Staff Specialist in Anaesthetics. The time our champions commit to driving forward reduce, reuse and recycle strategies is outside of their already demanding day jobs.

Dr Swinkels said: “As our country burns, climate change and sustainability have never been more at the forefront of consideration and debate. Our hospitals, and especially our peri-operative services, have come an incredible way in the past 12 months in introducing some fantastic initiatives.

“Our Anaesthetic Waste Warrior team started last year as a small group of professionals who felt that we should be doing more to divert waste from landfill. We have since recruited more interested individuals and have been able to successfully introduce quite a few initiatives. Most of this has been done on our own time.

“SCHHS now has an Environmental Sustainability Committee, and Queensland Health has also issued formal sustainability mandates for 2020, including ridding our hospitals of certain single use plastics,” Dr Swinkels said.

“Hospitals have an enormous amount of purchasing power and can strongly influence the supply demand chain. Whilst always ensuring quality of patient care, we can choose products that have a higher emphasis on sustainability. This may be achieved through
improved packaging that is either made of recycled products or is recyclable or biodegradable.

“Excitingly, we are now seeing suppliers within our industry take more ethical responsibility for their products. Certain medical companies are now funding the collection and recycling of their own PVC or mixed plastic products and packaging. Any opportunity to divert this waste from landfill will not only help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but will save our health service money,” she said.

Dr Terblanche added: “We know taking care of our environment matters to our community, research has shown that 7 in 10 Queenslanders are taking steps to reduce their consumption of single use plastics when away from home. Our environmental footprint initiatives are another way we deliver on what matters to our community here on the coast.”

MEDIA OPPORTUNITY
Interviews and tour of some of the environmental initiatives with Dr Stacey Swinkels
When: 29 Jan, 10:30am
Where: Meet at SCUH main reception

ENDS

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