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Sustainability in Health Care

Planet health is intrinsically linked to human health. Globally, health care leaders are recognizing that quality care must be provided in such a way that it protects individual, community and global health. We are expanding our advocacy work to the protection of ecosystems, air, water, soil and organisms that support life. Health care is working to “walk the talk” by conserving resources, reducing toxicity and pollution, and supporting local economies. Some efforts – not all – result in cost savings. Others are simply the right thing to do.

Our Sustainability Journey

Virginia Mason Health System is not only an award-winning leader in quality, we also are an award-winning leader in health care sustainability. Since starting our journey with recycling in the 1980s, Virginia Mason has consistently grown our sustainability initiative, EnviroMason, into a national model. Here are some highlights of our journey:

- 1980s – Recycling begins at our facility.
- 1990s – Energy efficiency efforts kick off our conservation efforts.
- 2000s – Composting begins on campus, the first in the region.
- 2010s – Recycling begins in the operating room, the first in the region. Sustainability program expands to include a formal Green Team and Sustainability Director.

Our Sustainability Initiative

EnviroMason, our sustainability initiative, is supported on all levels of our organization. We implement sustainability programs and projects with a “Lean and Green” approach using the Virginia Mason Production System (VMPS). Our initiative is divided into two main focus areas: transformational leadership and operations integration.

Virginia Mason is leading efforts to transform our community into a healthier place by raising awareness about the connection between the environment and health. From the White House to COP 21 in Paris to the City of Seattle, we have spoken up to support efforts to combat climate change, reduce pollution, protect healthy food systems and develop low-carbon transportation options.

In addition to advocacy, Virginia Mason works tirelessly to walk our talk when it comes to sustainability. We focus on integrating sustainability into our day-to-day work while delivering the highest quality of care. Our Green Team, made up of team members from throughout the organization, help to inspire, identify and implement projects that can reduce our environmental impact.

Program Successes

Our Seattle Hospital and Medical Center has achieved many successes. Here are some highlights:

- Our energy conservation projects since 2011 have saved more than 4.5 million kilowatt hours per year.
- Our water conservation projects undertaken since 2011 save almost seven million gallons of water a year.
- Our recycling and composting program achieved a 48 percent rate, and including construction debris, more than 50 percent.
- Our Food & Nutrition department buys almost 40 percent locally and/or sustainably.
- Our Supply Chain team has an environmental purchasing policy, and works to expand our sustainable purchasing.

Lean & Green

Virginia Mason Health System was the first health care organization to adopt the Toyota Production System in 2002. All our work, including sustainability, is accomplished using our own version of the Toyota Production System, the Virginia Mason Production System (VMPS). All our sustainability work is implemented using VMPS. Kaizen Events (two day intensive workshops?) have been held on topics like expanding our medical supply global health donation program, improving food sustainability metrics and reuse of office supplies.

The Virginia Mason Institute educates and coaches on the application of the Production System to clients from around the world. For more information on the Virginia Mason Production System and how it can transform health care, visit <http://www.virginiamasoninstitute.org>.

Awards

Virginia Mason’s Seattle Hospital and Medical Center has been recognized by third parties as one of the best in the nation:

- Top 25 Environmental Excellence Award, Practice Green Health – 2015, 2016
- Circles of Excellence, Practice Green Health – 2014, 2015, 2016
- 50 Most Sustainable Hospitals in the US, Becker’s Hospital Review – 2014, 2015
- Washington Green 50, Seattle Business Journal, 2012, 2013, 2014