

Preventive Maintenance: Catching Up and Doing It Right

Jill Schlabig Williams

In August 2003, a new clinical engineering department manager came on board at St. Vincent's Hospital in Jacksonville, FL, and discovered that the department's nine technicians faced an active schedule of more than 1,400 preventive maintenance (PM) checks. More than 500 of these checks were more than 90 days old. This workload was more than triple a typical workload of 450 preventive maintenance checks a month.

Background

Jonah Aycox, the new clinical engineering department manager, joined a department in transition in August 2003. The previous department manager had left in the spring, and an interim manager had concentrated on other areas requiring attention. By the time Aycox came on board, the PM backlog looked extreme.

Solution

Aycox developed a plan to eliminate the backlog by the end of the year. He informed management of the problem and of his plan.

The first step was to take a hard look at the list of equipment awaiting PM checks. "While the situation looked daunting, we found that the department had been issuing preventive maintenance tickets on things that should not have been issued," says Aycox. Clinical engineers typically use risk assessment tools to determine PM schedules on medical equipment. At St. Vincent's, every piece of equipment was being scheduled for preventive maintenance, regardless of its level of risk.

"We evaluated the preventive maintenance tickets to determine which ones were valid," says Aycox. Using existing hospital equipment management policies, he evaluated each piece of equipment for its function, type, level of risk, history, and manufacturer recommendations. Each piece of equipment was scored, and these scores were used to reschedule the equipment at more appropriate preventive maintenance intervals, with higher-risk equipment scheduled for more frequent checks and lower-risk equipment, for fewer checks.

By September, the technicians were hard at work per-

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Clinical engineering team at St. Vincent's Hospital

Subject: St. Vincent's Hospital

Location: Jacksonville, Florida

Beds: 528

Staff: 9 technicians and 1 manager in the clinical engineering department

forming preventive maintenance checks. "We challenged every person in our department to tighten their belts and get it done. We didn't want to jeopardize the safe operation of the equipment," says Aycox. Technicians rotated through four-day, 10-hour shift schedules two at a time to generate an additional four man-hours each day. "This schedule gave morale a boost," says Aycox. "We weren't working people to death, but technicians got extra hours in and periodically got three-day weekends as a result."

Outcome

On New Year's Eve, Aycox and his department crunched to eliminate the backlog. It took a full staff plus the manager into the night to meet their goal.

Aycox was pleased to be able to report to senior management that the backlog had been eliminated. Since then, the department has been performing an average of 450 preventive maintenance checks each month, with a 97% completion rate. "We have a tremendous staff that really stepped up to the plate to solve this problem," says Aycox. ■