



News Release

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Health Systems Form Initiative To Speed Greening of Health Care *Sustainability key to improving health and cutting costs, group says*

(Baltimore, MD) Six leading health care systems announced today that they have formed the Healthier Hospitals Initiative to help speed the health care sector toward environmental sustainability. The six systems—Advocate Health Care; Catholic Healthcare West; Hospital Corporation of America (HCA, Inc.); Kaiser Permanente; MedStar Health; and Partners Healthcare, introduced the Healthier Hospitals Agenda, a document that outlines specific activities that hospitals can take to reduce their environmental footprint and improve health outcomes. The overall goal of this national initiative is to use a coordinated approach to achieve sustainability throughout the health care sector, which will prevent environment-related illness, create extraordinary environmental benefits, and save billions of dollars in health care expenses.

“Collectively, the health care sector can stimulate the marketplace to make more eco-friendly products available, and we can inform public policies that support and facilitate the transition to environmental sustainability,” stated John Messervy, AIA, Director of Capital & Facility Planning, Partners Healthcare Boston, MA. “These measures can greatly reduce the overall costs of health care, as well as help protect the health of our patients, staff and community.”

The United States is experiencing an epidemic of chronic disease, including cancer, diabetes, and respiratory illnesses, which by government accounts, consumes almost 75 percent of health care expenditures. There is increasing evidence that environmental contaminants, pollution and emissions are linked to adverse health effects and that addressing the global ecological crisis is a core component in the prevention of chronic disease. On May 5, the President’s Cancer Panel stated that “the true burden of environmentally induced cancers has been grossly underestimated,” and advised that policies be put in place to reduce chemical exposures.

The health care sector, comprising 16 percent of GNP, has a large environmental footprint. Hospitals are the second most energy intensive buildings in the country. They generate 6,600 tons of waste a day. They consume large amounts of water, operate food services, and use chemical-based products for

disinfecting, cleaning, pest control and grounds keeping. They utilize fossil fuels for transportation of patients, visitors, staff and supplies.

“Practicing good environmental stewardship is one way of fulfilling our role as health care providers to the communities we serve,” stated Kathy Gerwig, Vice-President for Workplace Safety and Environmental Stewardship Officer, Kaiser Permanente. “A sector-wide approach to sustainability will provide the benefits of better health not just in one community, but to the entire nation—by reducing the overall disease burden of the population, and the enormous financial and human toll associated with it.”

Tenets of the Healthier Hospitals Agenda include the following:

- Improve Environmental Health and Patient Safety: Engage in Environmentally Preferred Purchasing, reduce chemical use, actively seek alternative sustainable products, engage in green building, and purchase and serve healthy food and foods made in sustainable ways.
- Reduce Health Care’s Use of Natural Resources and Generation of Waste: Reduce consumption of energy, water, and raw materials; and minimize waste. Engage in inventory management, waste management and recycling programs; transition to renewable energy sources; eliminate incineration; and improve transportation strategies.
- Institutionalize Sustainability and Safety: Make sustainability principles an organizational priority with CEO-level support. Integrate into all areas of the organization and its activities, internally and externally through leadership, education, and accountability and engagement in public policy and community education. Encourage and incorporate sustainability as an essential element in the culture of the organization.

Hospitals can demonstrate their support for the program by becoming a sponsoring organization, or by signing a pledge of endorsement, and participating in activities to implement the Healthier Hospital Agenda in their institutions. They can also participate in the on-line sharing of information and expertise and collaborate with other health care institutions to encourage and assist with sustainability efforts.

Three partner organizations—Health Care Without Harm, Practice Greenhealth, and The Center for Health Design—will provide expertise and technical assistance and will develop and implement training and other programs to help hospitals carry out the HHI agenda recommendations. Research conducted under the auspices of the program will be overseen by the Health Care Without Harm Research Collaborative, sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Information on the Healthier Hospitals Initiative will be available on their website, www.healthierhospitals.org.

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