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Some of the key factors to a hospital’s success are the qualified clinicians and staff members, as well as proper medical equipment. All of these necessities require a certain type of budget in order to maintain. Hospitals receive a yearly budget that gets distributed throughout the hospital’s different departments. Depending on the department’s production, the hospital decides on where the money should go. Although the dental clinic is always busy, many patients lack dental insurance and visit the dentist only when it is absolutely necessary. Consequently, the hospital emergencies are usually severe, costly and require extensive care. In order to perform certain procedures, hospitals including the dental clinic depend on receiving the right supplies for both the clinician and the patient.  Important practices such as standard infection control need personal protective equipment to prevent cross-contamination. When there is a lack of these essentials due to a low budget, the hospital department faces big challenges that include being unprofessional, unethical, and even illegal.

According to *‘Safety Net’ Hospitals Face Federal Budget Cuts*, there was a $3.6 billion cut this year from the government: “$2 billion from a program that sends federal dollars to hospitals that serve a high percentage of Medicaid or uninsured patients, and $1.6 billion from a drug discount program. (4)” These budget cuts have a great effect on the hospitals that accept all patients regardless of their ability to pay. At Coosa Valley Medical Center in Tennessee, the cuts of the two programs will estimate a loss of $500,000 to $650,000 for the hospital (4). In this case, the hospital will do everything in its power to keep the business functioning even if that means cutting back on services or supplies and seeking another health care partner. As stated by the National Rural Health Association, there have been 83 rural hospitals across the United States that had closed due to these financial losses and 673 hospitals still at risk (4). It is clear to see that finances dictate the inventory and the future outcome of hospitals.

Hospital supply chains are expected to provide quick operations at reduced prices without compromising quality. When the prices of drugs increased, Cleveland Clinic had to work with physicians to identify the same quality drugs at lower cost options. Other budget cuts considered in past years forced the Yakima Neighborhood Health Services in central Washington to cut 17 of their 150 staff members and reduce clinic hours (7). Healthcare providers are pressured to manage with these forms of limitations and often are not able to keep the same quality of care for their employees, supplies, and thus their patients.

As stated by Bart Hove, president and CEO at Wellmont Health System, hospitals should try to find opportunities and form relationships with organizations that are in the same position looking for cost savings. Some solutions to receiving high quality supplies at a low cost is partnering with outside vendors and GPOs and negotiating with them to find the lowest price on products. Hospitals with small budgets should prioritize their spending so that they are purchasing the most essential items, but not neglecting PPE and safety. In addition, there should be communication between each department on what the necessary supplies are needed in order to accomplish the job with high quality.

Interning at Flushing Hospital Medical Center exposed me to some of the problems the facility faces that I later learned are all a result of a low budget. The dental clinic often has shortages of basic inventory such as over gowns, masks with eyewear protection and mouthwash. The lack of these supplies makes it difficult to follow the CDC infection control guidelines and can be detrimental to both the health of the patient and clinician. Automatically, not having the proper PPE already affects my ability to treat a patient. The situation put me at risk of infection. Learning that some of the residents and assistants started to bring their own lab coats from home, I was astonished at the hospital’s lack of concern for safety for its employees, as if it was just an option.

During my observations, I started to notice how certain supplies were being preserved, but the cleanliness was questionable. If a clinician did not use an item with plastic wrap in the cubicle, that plastic wrap would not be changed for the next patient. Pre-procedural rinses were never enforced. Although the mouth rinse that the hospital purchases fit the budget, it does not serve its purpose since it does not even contain an active ingredient to reduce bactericides. Another disappointment had been the limited amount of instruments we are provided with that makes it harder to adequately clean all surfaces of patients’ teeth. The lack of proper clinical instruments only takes away from the little time we already have to spend with the patient as it is. Although with the patient’s insurance playing a big role, teeth are usually only superficially cleaned anyway.

Old machines, such as the clinic’s radiographic film developer, have not yet gotten replaced due to the hospital’s funds. When radiographic images are exposed in poor condition due to the machine’s errors, the clinician sometimes has to guess in order diagnose and never relies on the radiographs alone. I realized that the dental clinic was not denying their struggles and that better funding was the solution to the problem. However, in order to keep the business running, the hospital ignores the issues and employees risk their safety to work through this dilemma.

Financial disadvantages for the hospital have a huge impact on staff members. It is often difficult for the dental clinic to maintain licensed translators without the proper funding. Instead, it seems that the hospital will hire accordingly so that the staff is fluent in other languages pertaining to the demographic of Flushing. The staff members are now doing two jobs in one and the hospital saves money. However, this type of translating without the proper licensed interpreter is actually illegal and may eventually lead to a lawsuit if there is ever a misunderstanding.

Unfortunately, this type of dilemma with hospital budget cuts is a national challenge. The only difference among all hospitals is how they utilize their budgets and prioritize on supplies. It is an inevitable domino effect that if you put your employees at risk and encourage them to be unprofessional and unethical, the quality of patient care will also be compromised. Options to improve hospital budgets could be by speaking out to lawmakers about the issues that hospitals face. Another idea could be to partner up with bigger companies, vendors, GPOs and organizations that can invest and may help donate to the hospital.  Either way, there is no denying that a change must occur at Flushing Hospital Medical Center to improve their quality of healthcare and to save their reputation.

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