



on the right track
systems, inc

× Geisinger

How Geisinger Health System Saved 7,000 Hours of Maintenance Time Annually with the Standardization of Disposable Cubicle Curtains

A Case Study

Added outcomes: Geisinger also realizes a reduction in HAIs, increased HCAHPS scores, and are able to improve their changeout reporting system, easily meeting compliance protocols.

Headquartered in Danville, Pennsylvania, **Geisinger Health System** is a regional health care provider that has been blazing innovations in health, wellness, research, systems, and care for over a century.

Geisinger is committed to making better health easier for the more than 1 million people it serves. Founded more than 100 years ago by Abigail Geisinger, the system now includes nine hospital campuses, a health plan with more than half a million members, two research centers and the Geisinger Commonwealth School of Medicine. With nearly 24,000 employees and more than 1,600 employed physicians, Geisinger boosts its hometown economies in Pennsylvania by billions of dollars annually. Learn more at www.geisinger.org, or connect with us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Twitter](#).

Geisinger's commitment to quality and innovation drives all patient care decisions and keeps the system in the forefront of America's healthcare evolution. Healthcare strategists, government leaders, and healthcare executives from around the world look to Geisinger "because we have assumed accountability for coordinating and organizing care in order to reduce variability, improve outcomes, and decrease costs," said Earl P. Steinberg, MD, executive vice president for innovation and dissemination.

As widely regarded as they are for their market leadership in medical research, advancements in telehealth, and education, the system has further learnings to share.

In a healthcare landscape that is rapidly adopting a hospitality driven approach, patient experience reigns supreme and an often overlooked - yet key impactful factor - are the details contained within the built environment. Patient perception occurs within seconds of entering a space and it is the in-the-moment intangible collective feeling imbued - from the thoughtful and intentional work put into all of the tiny tangibles. Think aesthetics, color, perception of clean, placement, visual continuity, sound, air quality, light reflectivity, overall ambiance.

When technical and practical necessities in healthcare, such as infection protection, ease of maintenance, operational excellence, patient and caregiver safety, and patient outcomes can be wholly addressed in tandem with a high-design aesthetic that ties in all the benefits of a hospitality experience, it is a clear win-win.

"Prior to this project, we were using cloth curtains that we were laundering in-house.", explains Bruce Thomas, vice president of hospitality services.

“Staff had to climb up and down ladders to both hang the curtains and take them down.” shares Joseph Mlinarich, associate vice president of quality, safety, and patient experience. The compliance standard for health providers is to clean curtains every 6 months, or twice a year. This is outside of the immediate exchange necessary for any type of isolation space, or space known to have contamination and possibility of pathogen transmission. “For laundering, they would have to put them in laundry bags, and send them to the laundromat in-house or the distributor that provided the curtains for us to clean them, then we would have to wait to receive the curtains back.”



Furthermore, Mlinarich explained the layered challenges of also leaning on a service. “When you work with a vendor you don't always get the same pattern curtain back. A room can look very unprofessional when you have one curtain that doesn't match the other three curtains.”

Another note when it comes to managing patterns, according to Mlinarich, “Many departments have different curtain patterns, and if they didn't have the right inventory volumes and had amassed a turnover of patients, sometimes we didn't have enough to re-hang. This resulted in timing issues, and then a mismatch of patterns and so forth came into play. It was challenging at every campus.” explains Mlinarich. “Some of our larger campuses had designated people solely dedicated to doing the discharge claim to hang and process the curtains.”

“As we acquired hospitals throughout the years there were always differences in curtains we were inheriting, and resulting questions on who is responsible for them, where to order replacement curtains, and where to order track. As we kept growing, we were constantly chasing, trying to identify a clearer and easier way of managing the cubicle curtains.” says Eric Nowak, associate vice president of environmental services.

When you really sit and begin to calculate the nuances of this effort, you quickly realize the inherent challenges, especially for a system the size of Geisinger. A streamlined system was lacking, and in turn an opportunity was identified. Not only for internal improvement purposes, but the ability to also report accurately externally in compliance became a fast priority.



“Discussions with On The Right Track started pre-pandemic, we got the go-ahead in December 2019.” says Melissa Godfrey, improvement optimization consultant for the transformation management office.

“It was a collaboration between nursing leaders, infection control, supply chain, environmental services, and regulatory,” explains Jane Martin, Director of EVS programs. “We had to go to executive leadership to secure the approval to move forward because of the financial impact associated with it.”

With executive leadership buy-in, and all departments on the same page, the project was assigned a dedicated manager to oversee execution and work between all departmental stakeholders in fostering a smooth roll-out.

“Having that project management and detailed oversight - keeping us all on track, and keeping the collaboration going, has been so important.” shares Martin. “I really don't think this project would have been completed in the way that it has been completed in time.” And not just in time - far ahead of time.

Beating The Planned Timeline by More Than Half

“While planning a project, I've never been this far ahead of schedule,” shares project manager, Melissa Godfrey, “The target was to be completed by December of 2022. If we can keep with the current pace, we will be completed by the end of August 2021, which is lightning speed and incredible.”

The ability for On The Right Track proprietary tracking to be retrofitted easily over any existing track is the key to this speed. **“90% of the installations are being done to existing tracks,”** says Godfrey. Michael Leavens, operations manager, further explains, **“This installation is not very intense for our platforms. They were able to build off of the track systems already in place, so there was no new drilling or creating dust, debris in the air, etc.** The system literally snapped in place to our prior tracks. The biggest issue was just removing the old curtains.”

What is quite a feat is this has all been implemented through the coronavirus

pandemic, with no interruption to patient care. "It's a minimal disruption to the patients. There are patients in the rooms as we're installing in many cases," says Godfrey. "There's not a lot of opportunity for dust since it's just a simple attachment with a couple screws."

With the unexpectedly speedy installation, a separate set of challenges arose to work through. "When you are this far ahead of schedule, budgeting is usually not prepared for it to be six months, eight months earlier than expected. There were shortages of materials also, which I think was partly due to the speed and efficiency of the work," says Godfrey.

Streamlining Compliance

"In an effort to more easily demonstrate compliance, we were trying to figure out a system that we could use to track the changeovers that were taking place and make sure that they were being documented," explains Godfrey.

"Regulators really want to see that documentation and they want to know that you have a plan," says Martin.

"We were able to expand on our previous in-house system that we have for tracking when curtains were replaced. We receive an automatic notification for change outs, and everything is documented digitally in SharePoint. Now, if any regulators come in, we are not trying to fumble through a file or a paper copy. That takes a lot of pressure off of everyone in the organization," shares Martin.

In addition to the technology piece for tracking more easily, the health system

needed to address the technical logistics issues associated with fabric curtains to further streamline the process.

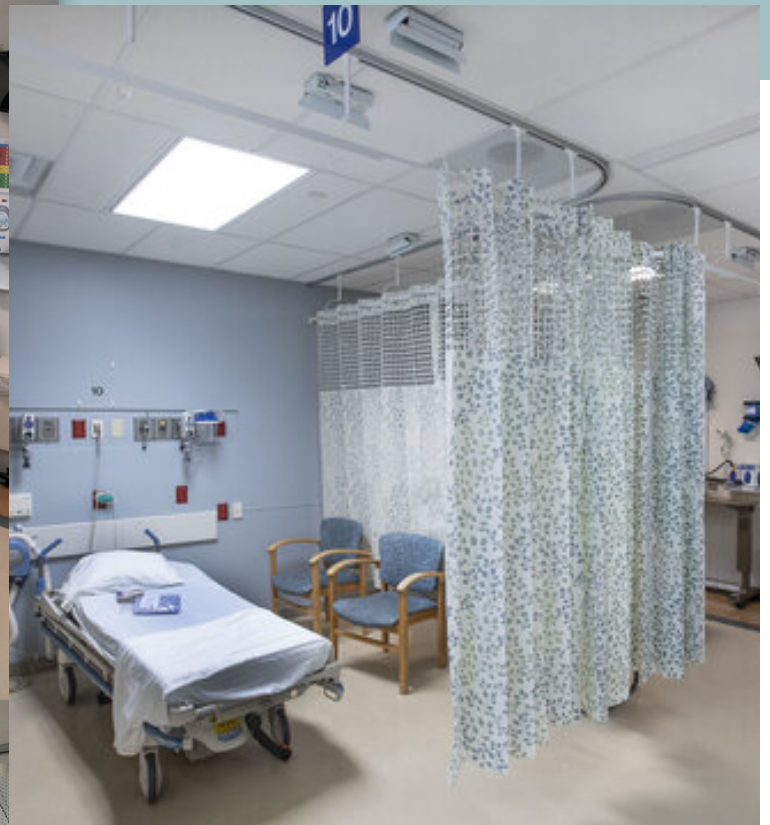
"The washing machines in particular didn't necessarily have the technology capabilities to be able to show our regulator that the cycle was this long, the water temperature reached this level of degrees, and the correct amount of product was dispensed into the washer during the laundering process," explains Martin, "There was a potential that we could work with one of our commercial laundry services.

The plan would be that we would take the curtains down, send them out to the commercial laundry, they would launder them, then they come back. But we do not have the luxury of waiting for that turnaround time to get those curtains back. The amount of costs that would be associated with keeping a large inventory of textiles at that point would be overwhelming."





The decision to proceed with On The Right Track disposable curtains entirely eliminated the need for laundering and gave the health system the opportunity to institute a visual continuity throughout all of their facilities by choosing only two curtain styles to be used everywhere throughout - one for pediatric areas, and the other for all remaining areas.



Traditional textile curtains and track system



A Modern Consistent Aesthetic

“You could go to any one of our inpatient units now and you know where you are. If you are a patient in Danville that gets transferred to one of our hospitals in Wilkes-Barre, the room is going to look very familiar. That is wonderful and that consistency of brand is important,” shares Bruce Thomas, vice president of hospitality services.

From a caregiver standpoint, the newly standardized curtains make an impact as well. “Anywhere you go is the same style and size curtain, and that’s just such a user-friendly experience. You can take a curtain from level two to level six in another wing and it’s all the same, with the exception of the children’s area of course,” says Godfrey. “It was a good investment not only for our community, but our teams have really appreciated it. They feel like they have gotten a refresh in their departments. It’s been an interesting year, and so any little ray of sun we can offer to our staff who have been working relentlessly against the odds, it just made it a nice experience for them.” Godfrey shares.

“I have heard from our nursing staff that they

are lucky to have the disposable curtains in place now, and really like the pattern choice. They find the pattern to be very calming,” says Kim Rankin, Associate Vice President of Nursing Services. “The curtains work well in both our inpatient and outpatient areas. Our nursing team members are comfortable with the quality of the curtains and agree that our patients find them pleasing as well. They have been a nice addition to our patient care areas.”

“I know that a lot of our patient satisfaction questions that are asked on the survey upon discharge speak to the cleanliness of the facility, and I think that the standardized look is more crisp and clean,” shares Gale Shalongo, director, nursing education, & magnet.

Enhancing Patient and Caregiver Experience and Safety

“There is a balance between creating that inviting experience in the patient room with a space that encourages the patient to get up and recognize daylight from nighttime for that optimal healing environment. Those dark, heavy curtains didn’t help.” says Amanda Yaskiewicz, Director of Patient Experience. When making rounds one morning and seeing the newly installed curtains for the first time, Yaskiewicz had several immediate thoughts. “I had no idea they were on all new runners as well. With the old hospital curtains, there is that distinct hard metal dragging sound. When you pull an On The Right Track curtain, there is a clean sound to it and an ease of use. They were just beautiful, modern, and fresh. They stood out to me and looked so streamlined, and efficient. It was very apparent to me, the difference between old and new.”



“Our cleanliness scores are on the uptick, and I contribute a lot of that to our outstanding environmental services team, but I have to wonder if the perception of those curtains and the clean look that it provides is having a positive impact as well.” says Yaskiewicz.

Operationally, the standardization has positively impacted caregiver safety with the newly simplified process of changing out the disposable curtains, which is done in seconds via a tool referred to as The Grabber, instead of having to climb up and down a ladder. “What was really appealing was the fact that they were easily accessible to take down and put back up.” Nowak solidifies, “That was number one because we wanted to get something that would enhance our safety and reduce any risk of workplace incidents.”

“Until I came into environmental services because I am a nurse by training, I had no idea what was involved in taking traditional cubicle curtains down and putting one up. That piece alone - and then the way they could get caught on different pieces of equipment, say IV poles, or other booms coming from the ceiling for equipment and sometimes those tracks and the hooks would be very temperamental. They would get stuck, so you could not close the curtains or open the curtains right, and a lot of times there would be a lot of damage because the hooks in the tracks were not working right. In going to a new product, I think we have taken that out of the equation,” shares Martin.

“The nightmare was ‘I have to find this type of textile curtain that matches in this area.’ EVS team members would enter the linen closet and be unfolding and folding, going through the pile, trying to find a match.

Now they walk in, grab it off the shelf, it is always the same size, we only have two prints, and they are easily identifiable. We are so thankful for this type of efficiency.” says Godfrey.

Reduced Hospital Acquired Infections

“There’s always the risk for some type of contaminant or bioburden to be captured in a curtain that may not be easily seen. The possibility of fluids that could be absorbed into the curtain, and the next person that touches it can then cross contaminate.” Mlinarich shares, “When you talk about a disposable curtain, you may think of something that is plastic, almost like a shower curtain. But the On The Right Track material is thick yet does not absorb fluids. If you throw a cup of water on it, it beads up and runs right off the curtain. That stands out from a cleanliness standpoint. If something gets on it, it is very easy to tell when there is some type of contaminant on the curtain, so we know to change it immediately before it could spread.”

“We initially thought that it would be a negative response but when we brought up the idea and showed our staff the pattern of the curtains, and the material that it was made of, and how it repelled contaminants, they were very excited about it.” says Mlinarich.

The system can point to solid progress in reduction of HAI’s. “We have seen a baseline reduction in our MRSA rate. We have also seen a reduction in our staph and in our C diff,” says Mlinarich, “We have continued to see infections decrease in our hospital. It’s harder to truly say but we believe that the curtains have some factor to play into the overall reduction in risk of infection.”

Ease of Maintenance

“With this new system I’d say we’ve saved 7,000 hours of maintenance time annually in relation to the cubicle curtains,” says Nowak. “We’ve estimated 3,500 hours saved annually, just in time spent taking down and re-hanging curtains. The balance of time saved is from laundering.

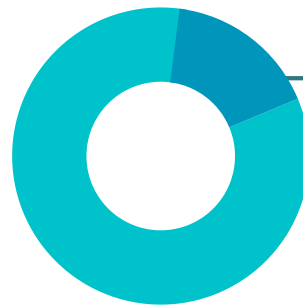
Not to mention utilities savings, like water and detergent and so forth.”





This was a laborious procedure, especially when considering fully saturated curtains can weigh about 5lbs a panel when wet. Another instance where On The Right Track has ushered in a paradigm shift. “Most people can now take down or put up the new disposable curtains with one hand using their grabber tool.” says Leavens.

“They’re lighter to transport, they are easier to install, they provide a safety feature that you don’t need to be up on a ladder. In almost every instance, it is a win-win,” echoes Godfrey.



OTRT disposable cubicle curtain weighs 1/6 of traditional washable cubicle curtain

“Traditional curtains were difficult given the footprint of a specific facility. The laundering area could be a great distance from where the curtain came down and needed to be re-hung. It could take up to 20 minutes each way to walk. Having the disposables now eliminates all of that.” says Leavens.

Another exceedingly time intensive piece of the traditional curtain protocol was hanging the curtains to air dry after completing their cycle in the washing machine. “If you were to dry the curtain in the dryer, it would break down the material components that provided fire resistance. Therefore, we had to hang them to dry, preserving the integrity of the fire-resistant coating,” says Leavens.

“Our patients rate us for cleanliness when filling out their Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) surveys. The scores seem to have an uptick since we have transitioned to the new curtains, which look cleaner. Perception of cleanliness has improved.” Says Joe Mlinarch.

Considerations For Peers Embarking on This Journey

“You have to look at the overall total cost of ownership. When you are dealing with disposable, you may think ‘Well this is going to cost me an extra year’ - but you are not looking at the cost of what the other product was prior. Look at your total cost, look at the time that it's taking your environmental services team, take a look at the time to get them laundered, take a look at the replacement cost.”, says Mlinarich. Continuing with another fundamental thing to understand going into a project such as this, he says, “Really figure out all the rooms that truly have curtains and identify the spaces that don't need curtains. Especially for larger organizations, do you have rooms that are no longer in-use? On The Right Track has a tool to help aid in estimating the number of curtains. It's really important to know.”

“Identifying all the key stakeholders within the organization upfront is key,” says Nowak, “We had to get many different areas involved - from facilities, to supply chain, to I.T., to nursing. You have to do a deep dive and have all stakeholders walk through the current state, and then future state, and ensure that everybody is on the same page. That's hugely paramount when having a project of this size. It's really important to know to avoid unnecessary costs.”

He also points to coming up with a system standard on patterns as critical. “That decision massively helps inventory control. Having multiple patterns for multiple departments can get very challenging to manage.” Nowak says.

Happy Caregivers and Staff, Happy Patients

“It's cool to be part of a project where people don't even mind that they're being inconvenienced. I have been a part of so many projects in the past where it feels like an uphill battle. I'm thankful and excited to continue to work through this because it's definitely making an impact for our patients and my colleagues.” says Godfrey. Noting the carryover of feeling and attitude when caregivers are happy - Godfrey points out that patients especially reap the rewards of that.

Furthermore, the new system directly influences patients positively in its own right. “You look at the overall benefit of bringing this product in and it was a no-brainer. We can get patients in and out better, and quicker. We can keep them safer. We can provide better care by not putting them at risk. We can reduce our length of stay potentially, by being able to make sure we do not give them an infection that they did not come in with. We give them a better atmosphere so that when they are there, it looks clean. The new curtains add a positive brightening atmosphere to the room.” Mlinarich says. He adds, “When you look at it from a return-on-investment effort and time standard there's huge benefit moving to the new product.”




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About On The Right Track

On The Right Track® cubicle curtain solution allows health systems to build an efficient, safe, and healthy environment. OTRT serves customers across North America, Asia, and the Middle East to:

- Further minimize the risk of Hospital Acquired Infections
- Lower curtain-replacement labor costs by 90%
- Cut laundry costs
- Overcome the risk of ladder accidents
- Maximize throughput
- Provide a better patient experience through consistent aesthetics and a virtually silent track system

On The Right Track® is 100% committed to creating environmentally conscious products. For more information about OTRT, visit www.ontherighttrack.com or contact us at moreinfor@ontherighttrack.com.

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