



Laundry/Linen Services: Looking Ahead to 2020

American Laundry News asked the International Association for Healthcare Textile Management (IAHTM) for its perspective on the year ahead as it relates to laundry/linen services. Responding on behalf of IAHTM is Charles Berge, president and general manager of Shared Hospital Services of Portsmouth, VA. Shared Hospital Services is a member company of IAHTM, and Berge serves on the organization's membership/marketing committee.



Background

IAHTM is a networking organization serving independent healthcare laundry cooperatives. Membership comprises experienced laundry executives serving more than 7,000 healthcare facilities in the USA and Canada.

A major benefit of IAHTM membership is the sharing among these executives of resources, support and knowledge for mutual and continuing success in an industry facing numerous changes. For example, IAHTM recently held its annual fall Educational Conference during which there were a number of presentations concerning the challenges our industry is facing today and in the future.

Here's a look ahead to 2020:

Biggest Challenges

IAHTM members compose a diverse group from all regions of the United States and Canada and yet we share similar challenges. Among them:

- Labor costs – Production labor continues to be challenging in every market. Many operators have raised starting wages to match within their region. We all agreed that we could do better outreach into the community.
- Professional recruitment and succession planning – How do the industry attract professionals to fill management and executive positions?
- Healthcare consolidation – Depending on the circumstance's consolidation can either expose current business or create business opportunities.

These challenges aside, we all agree one of the biggest responsibilities in the year ahead is to continuously communicate to our customers the extent of our endeavors within our operations and processes to ensure the delivery of hygienically clean textiles. Operators need to be proactive in this regard, rather than waiting for a call from their customer Infection Preventionist about some type of infection they're trying to track back to its origin. If you are not either accredited by the Healthcare Laundry Accreditation Council

(HLAC) (www.hlacnet.org) or TRSA Hygienically Clean (www.hygienicallyclean.org) this should be the year you consider accreditation.

Biggest Changes on the Horizon

The biggest unknown right now is what effect the political tariff issues will have on the raw materials and production of linens in China. Most of the larger manufactures have already prepared and moved exposed production to other regions of the world. We may see a disruption in production as textile manufactures seek alternative sources.

Other changes:

- Process improvement – We expect to see more focus by operators on processes improvement in the production of hygienically clean textiles beyond accreditation. More operators will be proactive and start looking at the textiles we provide and what antimicrobial affects they add as another layer in preventing hospital-acquired infections (HAIs). Some of these may include;
 - Cupron Medical Textiles: Linens manufactured with copper filaments imbedding into the poly fibers.
 - Medline / SilvaClean: Is an additive that is added to the wash process in the final rinse.

This is another opportunity to be proactive and educate your customers about new products offered in the industry.

What's Coming in 2020:

If you live in Connecticut, New York, or California you're probably familiar with *microplastics* and what they are. Simply put they are microfiber pieces of plastic 5mm or smaller that are turning up in the air we breathe, the water we drink, and just about everywhere including the arctic ice.

If you haven't heard about microplastics you will in time. Fortunately, there are new resources and solutions that help to monitor these sorts of challenges.

To help operators validate hygienically clean linens and work environment HLAC announced the availability of its new Laundry Process Monitoring ToolKit (PMTK). This toolkit offers independent testing of bioburden (textile) analysis, air sampling analysis, surface analysis, water analysis, and hand hygiene analysis. Test results are confidential and provided within 2 weeks. (for more information, visit <https://www.pmtknet.org/>). Utilizing PMTK within your facility provides you with yet another opportunity to communicate to customers how your laundry generates hygienically clean textiles.

Equipment and Supplies in 2020:

Even if you are an HLAC Accredited or Hygienically Clean Certified laundry facility this does not mean you can sit back and ignore improvements in the way you do business.

Ultraviolet (UV) lighting is gaining more traction in laundry operations. The use of UV for cleaning delivery vehicles (carts, and trucks) as well as conveyors and hard surfaces is

a practical and proven method. UV lighting is also being used for the treatment of process water in some laundry operations. UV lighting is also well received by the infection control representatives at the hospitals.

As we continue to face the issues with labor, we will have to look at more and more laundry production automation in our facilities. Artificial intelligence solutions are available for different parts of the operation, but they are a few years away from full implementation. Also, not everyone has an unending supply of money and square footage for all that technology requires. Automating the whole laundry comes at a price tag. Automating individual processes in the plant can be an affordable way to increase production and reduce labor costs.