

Sinai weighs in on new plan to cut hospital food waste

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Sinai Hospital wants to save some dough by not wasting bread.

Leaders of the Baltimore City hospital say they could save up to \$100,000 a year by using a new technology that helps them decide how much food should be prepared for patients and visitors. With the help of a computerized scale, Sinai officials weigh uneaten eggs, potatoes, soup and other foods to track how much unserved food is wasted each day.

It is the hospital industry's first stab at lowering the cost of food purchased for cafeterias, said Sinai's Gary Donnelly, and it could help Sinai trim 2 percent off its \$5 million annual food budget.

"I used to walk around looking in trash cans," said Donnelly, Sinai's assistant director of food and nutrition services. "The program has helped people start thinking about waste before it occurs."

Waste of all types is a big deal to hospitals. As they continue to fight for higher reimbursement levels to offset the rising cost of doing business, hospital leaders are looking for ways to cut costs without hurting patient care.

Cutting down on the amount of waste they produce -- and thus the amount of money it costs to dispose of or disintegrate that waste -- is one way hospitals can improve their bottom lines.

"Many hospitals are stretching to make the health care dollar work," said Cecilia DeLoach, state coordinator for Hospitals for a Healthy Environment, an advocacy group based in Washington, D.C.

The scale, developed by Oregon-based **LeanPath**, is called ValuWaste and used in Sinai's two main kitchens. Sinai is one of 50 hospitals across the country to test the technology since October 2005. The **University of Maryland Medical Center** in Baltimore is another.

Here's how the system works: After placing food on the scale, a hospital employee answers a few questions about the type of food discarded, how it was discarded, why it was discarded and the type of pan in which the food was prepared. ValuWaste calculates how much money a hospital is wasting based on the weight of thrown away food. Three broken eggs cost roughly 58 cents, according to formulas installed in the machine.

The 400-bed hospital feeds 250 patients three times a day, Donnelly said. He downloads the scales data daily and meets with a committee of eight kitchen workers each week. The group reviews the data and makes suggestions to reduce the amount of food that is throw away.

From June 19 through Sept. 10 the value of thrown away food was \$15,756, according to ValuWaste data.

The system costs \$600 per month, said Andrew Shakman, CEO of LeanPath.



Nicholas Griner | Staff

Donnelly of Sinai Hospital displays the scale to weigh wasted food.