



24 Sustainability Success Stories in 2024

Story 21 of 24: Nursing and Sustainability

A Nurse's Perspective: Opportunities for Sustainability

The Center for Sustainability wanted to devote a month in the 24 in 2024 stories to nurses and their relationships to sustainability in hospitals.

At UPMC West Shore and UPMC Carlisle, **Sherry Mauch**, RN, director, Surgical and Perioperative Services, shared her inspiring journey in health care sustainability. Sherry's story is a testament to the crucial role nurses play in identifying and implementing sustainable health care practices. Their unique position allows nurses to see firsthand where improvements can be made, making them indispensable advocates for a greener future in the medical field that benefits the environment, patients, and staff alike.

How did she begin? With a simple observation: the large volume of supplies used in surgeries.

Sherry's eyes lit up as she talked. "I think one of the things that I often think of is how many supplies we use in surgery. It really is like a microcosm for the entire healthcare organization. We create so much waste, which in my mind also means we have a responsibility to decrease it," Sherry said.

When Sherry learned about the sustainability work happening at UPMC, she joined the system-wide Surgical Services Committee, as she saw this as an opportunity to make a difference by reducing the waste generated by a single surgery.

"It's such an interesting concept to look at it all and realize it is all essential, but there's always an opportunity to decrease the amount of supplies we open and increase awareness. We have what's called preference cards in the operating room," Sherry said. "Every single physician for every single procedure has a streamlined process. There used to be a nursing way of handling it, where you would open everything just in case. We've really transitioned away from that now."

The teams at UPMC Carlisle and UPMC West Shore are working on several more projects, including shutting down equipment and educating nursing staff on reducing energy use. Additionally, anesthesiologists are working to reduce the use of anesthetic gases, and Cardinal surgical pack trays were reviewed, with all plastic trays switched to a cheaper, biodegradable option.

Sherry's advice is powerful: "The environment is a key component, and everyone's impacted by it. Maybe sustainability isn't at the forefront of your thoughts when you're asking questions, but part of being a director is to make our environment better for our employees and our patients. By asking the question, you may start a change. I suggest putting something on and then seeing who's willing to engage from your nursing councils or your more global councils."

To learn more about sustainability work at UPMC and about joining a sustainability team, visit our [Viva Engage page](#).