

## **Green Procurement: the Key to Sustainability**

### **Ecologically sound products and services promote health – environmental protection in the health care sector reduces costs**

Hospitals are large consumers of products and services which could significantly improve their environmental performance by employing ecologically sustainable procurement policies. Healthcare facilities would thereby send out clear signals and recognise the positive effects on the health of patients and staff that are achieved by using products with less harmful substances.

Experiences and successes with green procurement in Austria, Germany, Denmark and Sweden are on the agenda of the first European Healthcare Congress for Ecologically Sustainable Products and Practices, which will take place from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2004 in Vienna. "CleanMed Europe" is being jointly organised by the Vienna-based Institute for Sustainable Healthcare ([www.inges.at](http://www.inges.at)) in partnership with the Vienna Hospital Association and the international organisation Health Care Without Harm ([www.noharm.org](http://www.noharm.org)).

Of course, demands for cleaning and disinfection are especially high in hospitals and, as a result, consumption of cleaning and washing products is correspondingly high. The result: Hospital staff is increasingly suffering from allergic reactions. Pollution levels in wastewater are rising, especially with regard to hormonal pseudo-oestrogens, which can pass through wastewater treatment plants. Through buying greener cleaners and staff training, it is not only pollution that can be considerably reduced: "We have reduced consumption by 23 percent and purchasing costs at first by 10 percent. After the latest tender, even 39 percent have been saved", reports Prof. Bruno Klausbruckner, environmental director at the Vienna Hospital Association.

For the majority of products used in hospitals, an environmental assessment is difficult. It is not only the material used, but also packaging, product life-cycle and user-friendliness that play an important role. As a result ecological purchasing criteria have been or are being developed in several countries. In Germany, an evaluation system for hundreds of products has been developed with 70 hospitals, allowing for realistic comparisons to be made. Dr. Anne Ipsen from Ökopol in Hamburg, who will present the system at CleanMed Europe: "In the vast majority of cases, those products used at the beginning of the project were not the best, in terms of quality, cost and ecological soundness."

The use of environmentally sound products does not always lead to direct cost savings – take for example organic food. In Viennese hospitals, 30 percent of food used is now organically grown, which lead to a cost increase of 17 percent. However, the economic and health advantages are self-evident on a macroeconomic level: lower energy and water consumption, a reduction of dangerous substances and waste, animals are kept appropriately to the species, genetic modification is banned and the quality of soil is maintained. All this contributes significantly to health prevention. Experts estimate that 40 percent of all illnesses are linked to malnutrition. And the costs for treating these illnesses are magnitudes higher than those caused by buying green.

Even the large group purchasing organisations (GPOs) in the USA, which spend billions of dollars annually on medical products and hospital supply, are increasingly taking into account ecological criteria. Gina Pugliese RN, MS from Premier, one of the largest GPOs in the States, will report in detail about their experiences at CleanMed Europe.