**Care Home Laundry: A More Streamlined Solution**

**Does your care home operate an in-house laundry facility and, if so, have you considered outsourcing this service to an external supplier? Whether or not this is currently part of your longer-term plan, international multi-service provider Elis, explains what you need to know:**

**Improved operational efficiency: time and cost savings**

While laundry is an essential daily task for care homes, it will rarely be front-of-mind for care homes, especially regarding the many intricacies that contribute to the successful day-to-day running of a laundry facility. However, staff tasked with managing in-house laundries will know only too well how time-consuming and demanding the process can be.

When operations run smoothly it’s a job that’s often taken for granted, but when things go wrong it can have a profound impact across all levels of the care home. It’s estimated that around half of all care homes with in-house laundry facilities suffer a machine breakdown once every six months, and for some this can occur as many as four times per year, causing significant disruption to services.

As well as this disruption, equipment failure can have major financial implications. Not only is there the cost to service and maintain items, and repair or replace faulty parts, but there may also be the requirement to temporarily outsource laundry services at short notice, for which there can be a premium to pay.

Using an approved commercial supplier can eliminate this risk. With multiple machines, often across multiple sites, professional service providers can guarantee continuity of service at all times. Insurance premiums can also be reduced due to lower risk of fire or staff injury, while using a hire service offers financial benefits rather than tying up capital to purchase linen items.

**Better use of resources: staff availability and space**

The comfort and wellbeing of residents in care home settings is of the utmost importance at all times, and outsourcing laundry services will free up valuable time and resources so staff can focus more fully on delivering comprehensive care to residents. Another associated benefit, however, is the additional space this can provide.

Space is a major issue for many care homes, and while it has been traditional to install, equip and operate in-house facilities for washing, drying and ironing flat linen and clothing garments, those who have chosen to outsource this service have benefitted greatly as space is always at a premium.

Cupboards for storing clean linen and a separate area for handling soiled items are still required to ensure compliance with government HTM01-04 guidelines for the decontamination of linen for health and social care, but these are likely to take up a significantly smaller area than a typical, in-house, infection control compliant laundry.

Whether this reclaimed space is utilised for other operational activities, to provide enhanced facilities for residents or to generate additional revenue through increased bed space, the advantages are not to be underestimated.

**Track and trace: a more reliable solution**

Personal clothing garments that are misplaced or lost during in-house laundering can be a cause of upset and distress to care home residents, and the time spent by staff searching for missing items can have an adverse effect on care levels provided. Taking this potential headache out of the equation can therefore dramatically streamline the laundering process.

With an outsourced, fully-managed service there is no need to apply individual name labels to garments. Instead, residents are provided with a number of laundry net bags for soiled items, each having both an eye readable label with the residents’ name and a bar code.

Bags are collected by the driver and on arrival at the processing facility they are scanned in. After being tracked through the washing, drying and finishing parts of the process the items are wrapped, before being returned to the relevant care home facility. This means that items linked to individual residents are traceable throughout the entire laundering process, leaving less room for error and resulting in a smoother, more efficient and reliable service.

**Infection control: full compliance**

Care homes that make the switch to a professional outsourced laundry service should ensure that their supplier meets the latest best-practice guidelines for infection control and prevention. Never has this been more important than throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

This includes compliance with the Department of Health’s HTM01-04 policy and guidance on the decontamination of linen for health and social care, as well as the EN14065 standard on bio-contamination control in processed textiles.

The correct handling of linen and laundry to prevent the spread of infection, as well as appropriate decontamination processes, are a key requirement for care homes under Department of Health guidelines, so this is just a further example of how outsourcing can deliver peace of mind for care home managers, as well as staff and residents.

**Switching is simple**

Making the switch to a professional outsourced laundry and linen supplier is a far simpler and more straightforward than you might initially think. Firstly, a service schedule is agreed, which outlines the number of deliveries and collections your care home will receive each week. For flat linen, a simple needs analysis is carried out to establish what quantity and type of items are required based on average usage, bed changing policies and residents’ needs. This determines the approximate level of stock you will need, including a buffer for unexpected usage. Once a week, care home staff will then need to advise how much clean linen the home has remaining, so suppliers can send a delivery with sufficient items to top stocks back up to required levels.

***Elis has been a trusted partner to health and residential care settings for over 30 years, providing a range of professional, outsourced textile rental and laundry services. For more information on how Elis can help streamline processes at your care home visit uk.elis.com or call 0808 281 0310.***

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