

ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMICS

THE BUSINESS OF GOING GREEN

Private clinic takes a green approach

By Ian Campbell

It is extremely challenging to reduce carbon emissions in hospitals. Life-critical procedures depend on power and high availability, but that hasn't stopped Galway Clinic from making giant strides towards becoming more sustainable and self-sufficient.

The private hospital, owned by the Sheehan Group, is a state-of-the-art medical facility that first opened its doors in June 2004. General manager Denis Coen has been charged with exploring ways of making the hospital more sustainable.

"By this year, we wanted to reduce our carbon footprint and concentrate on being more environmentally-friendly at the same time as controlling costs. Utility bills eat into your bottom line," he said.

Coen identified two goals as priorities for the hospital: to reduce energy costs and encour-

age changes in behavioural habits among employees. He said the "easy wins" were the common-sense steps that people could take to save on energy.

These include anything from switching off lights when you leave a room to turning off radiators when they get hot, in-

Company:
Galway Clinic

Sector: Healthcare

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stead of opening the window.

For more sophisticated solutions, Coen turned to Caraghbridge, a Kerry firm with a range of energy-saving products and services. The company places great emphasis on data collection and advanced metering technology.

"You can't manage anything that you don't measure, so that was our main emphasis. We went into partnership with Caraghbridge and started out by measuring the energy that was used in our operating theatres," said Coen.

He said that the clinic was the only hospital in Ireland that had sensors in every department, measuring the consumption of everything from water and electricity to gas and oil.

Such a detailed audit exposed wasteful practices that were easy to eliminate. Air humidifiers that were on permanently, for example, are now switched off at predetermined times, saving the hospital thousands of euro a year.

Two year ago, the hospital



Galway Clinic: the private hospital is doing its utmost to become more energy-efficient

deployed a combined heat and power (CHP) system. The main energy source is natural gas, which is used to generate electricity and heat simultaneously.

"It is a lot more environmentally-friendly and we are able to generate a certain amount of electricity. We are not totally reliant on the national grid," said Coen.

The hospital also took the decision to bore for water on

its grounds and hit a stream 70 metres down. The well provides 90 per cent of the hospital's needs, while mains water is used for the remainder.

The limestone in the area contributes to the high quality of the water at source, but it is also treated to ensure that it conforms to health safety standards.

The clinic has an onsite laboratory, which is used to carry out regularly tests to ensure

that the highest quality of water is maintained.

In a separate initiative, the hospital has also invested in a water harvesting system for collecting rainwater. This is used to water the grounds and for cleaning down storage areas.

Other projects are less spectacular, but the benefits of even the most modest initiatives are evident in the culture change that has gradually taken place

in the hospital. In administration areas, it is now common practice to power off computers completely, rather than leave them in sleep mode.

"This is the behavioural change we wanted because we had to have buy-in from all of our 500 staff if we were going to make this work," said Coen.

"At home, people already think in terms of recycling and electric charges, so it is just about getting them to bring

that mindset to work."

Management and staff in all departments were encouraged to come up with innovative ways to reduce waste. Forty-three per cent of waste is now recycled thanks to the rigorous separation of plastics, glass and cardboard.

Although it is hard to benchmark hospitals, the clinic can demonstrate that its waste creation per patient, per bed, is below the European standard.