THE CHALLENGE

Ask any supplier what drives product innovation, and they’re likely to give you all kinds of answers – market research, leadership direction, brainstorming processes, etc. In today’s competitive business world, suppliers who can intertwine product development and customer feedback will be the ones that reap strong competitive advantages and earn raving customer advocates. And that’s exactly what happened for AMD-Ritmed, a manufacturer of specialty surgical dressings and disposable protective apparel, when they listened to the needs of Seattle-based Virginia Mason Medical Center.

Virginia Mason, founded in 1920, is a non-profit regional healthcare system that employs approximately 6,000 people and includes a 336-bed acute care hospital, a primary and specialty care group practice of more than 460 physicians, and regional medical centers throughout the Puget Sound area. This world-renowned organization is dedicated to innovation and thinking in new and different ways. It’s a commitment that is very much rooted in Virginia Mason team members. So when Lynn Bailey, RN, clinical product review specialist, was not content with the standard isolation gown staff were using, she resolved to innovate instead of accepting the status quo.

THE SOLUTION

“It is critical for Virginia Mason to maintain a state of continuous compliance with the standards of The Joint Commission,” said Bailey. “However, the isolation gown at the time was hot and uncomfortable to wear. So I met with Susan Soetaert, director of Infection Prevention at the time, and together we talked about what our ideal isolation gown would look like.”

After developing criteria for their model isolation gown and a list of ‘clinical must haves,’ Bailey initially had difficulty finding a partner that could meet Virginia Mason’s stringent standards until she was introduced to AMD-Ritmed.

Bailey reached out to AMD-Ritmed, speaking initially with Scott Hall, National Sales Manager. After reviewing the ‘must-haves’ list for an isolation gown over the phone, Hall realized AMD-Ritmed did not have a gown that met their criteria. Nevertheless, he was not deterred by the request. In fact, he flew to Seattle for a meeting with Bailey and her team.

After several meetings, AMD-Ritmed agreed to produce a prototype of Virginia Mason’s isolation gown that would address their need for quick and easy donning and removal while maintaining exceptional protection and comfort. The goal was to not allow time constraints and inconvenience to be an excuse for not upholding proper gown compliance.
“When AMD-Ritmed presented us with our prototype, I was simply amazed,” said Bailey. “It fulfilled every feature on our ‘must haves’ list. And they agreed to implement our minor changes to the prototype without any cost increase to the gown.”

AMD-Ritmed said they’d be able to manufacture and deliver the new isolation gown for Virginia Mason within 8-10 weeks. Unfortunately, Bailey had a desire to introduce and evaluate the new isolation gowns at a staff event that was scheduled to occur in four weeks.

Although the timeline was extremely tight, AMD-Ritmed accepted the challenge. Production on the gowns began immediately and the new gowns arrived on time for the Virginia Mason event.

THE OUTCOME

Virginia Mason staff were asked to wear the new isolation gowns while at the employee event and were required to apply the same Standards Precautions when donning and removing the gown as they would do on the job.

Virginia Mason and AMD-Ritmed were both anxious to receive feedback on the fabric’s breathability, flexibility and strength. The double elastic closure at the neck was an innovative new concept to provide staff with quick donning and to prevent slipping. In addition, the thumb loops were designed for extra protection against sleeve ride up and the generous waist ties to lend additional versatility and protection.

“I connected with AMD-Ritmed, which was able to create a product our staff was willing to wear. Compliance is no longer an issue. The gown is comfortable, breathable and provides the protection we need.”

Lynn Bailey, RN · Clinical Product Review Specialist · Virginia Mason Medical Center

Bailey noted, “There was nothing like our isolation gown on the market so it was important to have all the staff together to test the product. As they were leaving the event, staff were asked to complete a short evaluation form to document whether they liked the gown and if it was clinically acceptable. Susan and I were confident that the gown would meet the expectations of staff and it was reassuring when the results proved us correct.”

Because of their long-time affiliation with Intalere, and as a final step to formalize the relationship with AMD-Ritmed, Virginia Mason requested they become a contracted supplier of Intalere*.

“Becoming an Intalere supplier was the easiest step of this engagement. Both of our organizations continually look for opportunities to provide new technologies, products and services for healthcare providers. This shared philosophy helped to solidify our partnership,” said Hall.

The isolation gown inspired by Virginia Mason is now patented and available to Intalere members and others nationwide as the Assure Wear™ and the VersaGown with Flexneck™ technology. Virginia Mason purchases nearly 400,000 of these gowns each year.

“It’s nice to see a supplier that was really listening to our needs and created a product that our staff was willing to wear,” said Bailey. “Compliance is no longer an issue. The gown is comfortable, breathable and provides the protection we need.”

“There was a clear hole in the market and it was Lynn’s ‘must haves’ list that has taken the industry in a totally new – very compliant – direction. AMD-Ritmed was just happy to be a part of it,” said Hall. “We are also proud to partner with Intalere in helping to bring this innovation to the wider market through their extensive member network.”

And the collaboration between Virginia Mason and AMD-Ritmed continues...they have designed a chemo hazard gown for oncology together.

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