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Reduction of Di-2 ethylhexyl Phthalate (DEHP) in Respiratory Therapy Products

Environmental and Human Health Impact: Converted 36 percent of respiratory therapy product's to DEHP-free options thereby reducing neonatal exposure to DEHP, which has been shown to cause damage to male patient reproductive systems, while undergoing treatment in the intensive care unit.
Business Impact: The selected vendor offered 23 percent cost savings over incumbent vendor.

Challenge

Kaiser Permanente is taking actions to reduce patient and employee exposure to harmful chemicals that are known to pose health risks. Chief among these is the reduction of DEHP exposure to our most vulnerable patients, those in neonatal and pediatric intensive care units. DEHP is used as a plasticizer to make tubing and other medical plastics more flexible, and is known to leach from plastic during use and thereby enter the patient. Respiratory therapy involves the assessment and treatment of breathing disorders including chronic lung problems, such as asthma and emphysema, and the respiratory components of acute multisystemic conditions such as heart attacks and stroke. This category contains many flexible plastic products such as breathing circuits.

Aim/Goal

Identify and select respiratory therapy product vendor(s) who currently have, or are willing to develop in a short timeframe, clinically acceptable DEHP-free products, and convert product usage as soon as possible.

Team

Dr. David Goya, Chair of the Respiratory Sourcing and Standard Team (SST)
Clarisse Lopes, Sourcing Manager, KP Procurement & Supply
Keith Johnson, Service Line Director, MedAssets

Actions Taken

- ✓ The Respiratory SST identified this category as a 2010 opportunity to reduce neonatal and pediatric intensive care units (NICU/PICU) usage of DEHP products.
- ✓ Assessment of product utilization indicated significant opportunity for improvement as we currently didn't use any DEHP-free products.
- ✓ A standard sourcing effort was undertaken with an emphasis on identifying alternative suppliers and products that are DEHP-free.
- ✓ Line item level environmental data was obtained in the RFP by utilizing the Sustainability Scorecard for medical products.
- ✓ Through market and supplier research and the RFP, the SST decided to change vendors and award a single source national standard, requiring a conversion allowing access to an increased number of DEHP-free alternatives.

Results

The new contract increases KP's usage of DEHP-free products in the NICU/PICU environment from zero to 36 percent of respiratory therapy sub-categories.*

Subcategories that are DEHP-free are:

- Filtered isolation valve kits
- Infant nasal CPAP (continuous positive airway pressure) system and cannula
- Nebulizer adaptor
- Water trap

*The remaining 64 percent of sub-categories are made up primarily of masks, nasal cannulas and nebulizers for which there is currently no existing, or clinically acceptable DEHP-free alternative in the marketplace.

- ✓ New vendor demonstrated a strong willingness to work with KP to develop additional DEHP-free products and raw material.

Lessons Learned

- ✓ The supplier community has yet to prioritize the elimination of DEHP from products.
- ✓ There are high quality clinically acceptable product options available but they are limited in depth and scope.
- ✓ Conditioning the supplier community will remain a challenge and priority in all product categories.

Next Steps

- ✓ Assure conversion to all viable DEHP-free opportunities by reviewing associated spend and utilization data regularly.
- ✓ Develop timeline with vendor for new product development in high volume categories.

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