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Clean Hospitals Day 2026: Empowerment of Environmental Services Staff

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Every year on October 20th, healthcare facilities around the world celebrate Clean Hospitals Day to raise awareness about the importance of healthcare environmental hygiene and environmental services (EVS) staff. This year's theme is Empowerment.

A microbiologically safe healthcare environment is essential for preventing healthcare associated infections (HAIs). It is estimated that 10-30% of all multidrug-resistant organisms are transmitted through the healthcare environment,[1] meaning that the percentage of HAIs due to suboptimal environmental hygiene are likely significantly higher[1,2] resulting in millions of infections globally per year.[3] Appropriate healthcare environmental hygiene programs are essential for both infection prevention and high-quality of patient care.

Unfortunately, environmental service departments are often among the most underfunded departments in hospitals, and EVS workers are often treated like housekeeping staff in the service industry: not adequately trained, integrated, or compensated in accordance with their importance as essential frontline healthcare workers.[4] There is often a high turnover rate of EVS staff in healthcare facilities, as well as low job satisfaction. Many institutions don't consider them as essential healthcare workers, and they often work under high pressure with very little training and without the necessary materials and institutional support to correctly perform their work.[4–6] It is important to note that staff empowerment does not replace giving EVS workers decent working conditions and fair pay.

The effects of staff empowerment have been studied in healthcare for decades, and there are few interventions that improve attitudes and behaviors as much. Although it is common knowledge that EVS workers are often lack empowerment,[5–7] there is still a significant research gap concerning the effects of empowering EVS workers specifically. Still, the empowerment of nursing staff has shown consistent measurable positive

outcomes in the quality of work performed, employee satisfaction, retention rate, performance, productivity and patient care.[8–10] It is therefore likely that some of the lessons learned from nursing apply to EVS staff.

The conditions for structural empowerment include access to information, resources, support, opportunities, and formal and informal power.[11] Further research on empowerment in healthcare also suggests the importance of psychological empowerment. It suggests that creating empowering work conditions is not enough; EVS workers also need to experience their work as meaningful, feel competent, have a sense of self-determination, and feel that their work has an impact.[12] When structural and psychological empowerment elements are both met, then they lead to positive outcomes for both the workforce and the healthcare facilities.

EVS managers and healthcare facility managers should consider empowering working conditions for EVS workers in order to increase healthcare facility hygiene and the quality of patient care. Empowerment should be seen as a concrete intervention to be implemented, and not as an abstract idea. The promotional toolkit for healthcare facilities is available from this link: https://cleanhospitals.com/promotional-toolkit-2026/. The seven posters have been translated in 22 languages and are available to everyone. Celebrate Clean Hospitals Day and empower the people who make safer, cleaner care possible every single day!