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GlobalCare Creates a New Business Model to Reduce Health-Care Furniture Costs

Hospitals are under fire to cut costs; patient stays are getting shorter. Against the backdrop of a health-care system under stress, GlobalCare, in conjunction with St. Joseph's Health System, has created a new business model for delivering better, more cost-effective furniture for health-care and extended-care needs. "This is a first as far as we're concerned," says Jay Ayres, Director, Group Purchasing Organization and Materiel Management for St. Joseph's Health System.

"Our regular customers benefit, too," says Joel Feldberg, Executive Vice President, Global Group. "Products developed for St. Joseph's may become items in our regular line, all leading-edge and market tested."

St. Joseph's is one of Canada's largest health-care networks, with member institutions specializing in acute care, long-term care, community care, rehabilitation, hospice, community outreach and mental health.

The system is based in Ontario and comprises St. Joseph's Home Care, Hamilton; St. Joseph's Lifecare Centre, Brantford; St. Joseph's Villa, Dundas; St. Joseph's Health Centre, Guelph; St. Joseph's Healthcare, Hamilton; and St. Mary's General Hospital, Kitchener. Together, they have 4,734 employees, 1,608 beds and a \$550-million (Canadian) budget.

In 2002, the CEOs of the six facilities decided that with big expansion plans on their respective drawing boards, it would be wise to examine how they were procuring furniture and if there might be a better way. The goal was to order as a group not merely to lower unit costs, but also to obtain a better product.

Ayres assembled a committee with delegates from all the facilities, ensuring that the needs of patients, visitors, caregivers, health-care staff and operational staff would be well represented.

The committee developed an extensive list of performance criteria. For instance, chairs and fabrics had to be moisture proof, easily cleaned and able to withstand harsh cleaning chemicals. The committee also articulated the needs of traditionally overlooked patient groups. For example, chairs for geriatric or visually impaired younger patients had to provide visual contrast. Bariatric patients [weighing more than 350 lbs.] needed a chair that was wider and stronger than regular chairs. The aesthetics had to ensure that large patients did not feel stigmatized when sitting in a bariatric chair.

The committee drafted a request for proposal (RFP). Responses from interested vendors were judged on the basis of specifications of the product versus requirements, price, warranty, vendor company history and service, and whether the vendor could submit multiple products.

In seating, RFPs were issued in 13 categories: office chairs, conference chairs, meeting-room chairs, standard waiting room chairs, upgradeable waiting room chairs, lab stools, clinical-nurse stools, patient-room chairs, guest chairs, sleeper chairs, long-term care dining chairs, long-term care waiting chairs, and long-term care leisure and lounge chairs. Twenty vendors responded. "We evaluated 730 chairs. It took one year," Ayres says.

After selecting the top three submissions for each category, the number of chairs was reduced to approximately 35. At this point, committee members visited the vendor's premises to inspect the short-listed chairs and see that they conformed to the written description in the response to the RFP.



Short-listed chairs were brought into St. Joseph's facilities and tested in actual-use conditions for several days. Besides rating each chair, evaluators recommended modifications to make the chair more suitable for their facility's needs. Global was selected to be the supplier for all seating, filing cabinets and casegoods (freestanding desks, credenzas and tables).

The process benefited St. Joseph's in several ways. Standardization and pricing are in place, simplifying further purchases during the life of the contract. And, as Ayres points out, "Now we have seating and furniture that more closely meets the needs of our facilities than ever before, at a lower cost than if each facility had negotiated alone."

Global also benefits. Besides being a large and loyal customer, St. Joseph's acts as an adjunct to Global's research-and-development department.

"Global turned out to be a wonderful company to work with," Ayres says. "Saul and Joel Feldberg and David Glass attended every ongoing review we had at the GlobalGroup Centre. How often do you have the president, the executive vice-president and the senior VP of sales and marketing coming to your meetings? They heard, they listened, they understood."

GlobalCare, a division of Toronto-based Global Group, is a premier international designer, manufacturer and marketer of hospital and long-term care furniture in the value market segment. Together with office seating and systems furniture from Global Contract, GlobalCare provides a total facilities furniture solution, from patient rooms and lounges to nursing stations and private offices. Visit us at www.globaltotaloffice.com.

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