

PEST MANAGEMENT In Medical Facilities

- Riaan Meyer
Pest Control Specialists Group



It goes without saying that pests are unacceptable in a hospital environment. It is known that many pests contribute to the spread of disease and pose an increased risk to sick people and can compromise the facility's sterile conditions. At the same time, many patients are especially vulnerable to pesticides. It is, therefore, important that we follow a pest management programme in hospitals which will prevent and control pests, using the least hazardous approach.

There are no pests which are unique to hospitals. Furthermore, hospitals and health-care institutions mostly consist of buildings and facilities which are not unique to that industry. Kitchens, receiving areas, rooms where people sleep, offices, lobbies, workshops, toilets and washrooms etc. are very similar whether in a hospital or elsewhere.

There are, however, various environmental factors at health-care facilities that may contribute to pest survival and even proliferation. These include things such as the buildings that are normally warm, there are plenty of food sources in many locations, the presence of organic waste, waste scraps, lots of movement of people (patients, staff, visitors), water sources in many locations, etc.

Other factors make pest eradication difficult. The facilities normally function 24 hours 7 days a week, some areas are difficult to access, equipment cannot be moved, patients cannot be moved from rooms requiring treatment, regular cleaning quickly removes insecticide deposits. In addition, exposure to chemical remedies may pose a greater than normal health risk

to patients.

An effective pest control programme, based on integrated pest management (IPM) techniques, is essential when providing pest control services to medical and related facilities. Relying on spray programmes alone is not only ineffective, it is potentially very dangerous.

One of the most critical factors in establishing an effective IPM programme in a hospital environment is obtaining co-operation from all staff in the various departments. This requires that the pest control service provider gets management support before anything else, otherwise it is likely that his efforts to carry out pest countermeasures in the different sections of the hospital will meet with resistance.

The next most important action which is required from a pest control service provider in such an environment is a thorough initial and regular ongoing inspection of the facilities. He has to use his investigative skills to search out any and all areas of problems. The tools and procedures for doing so will be similar to those used in food handling establishments.

The different aspects of such an investigation is the same as elsewhere:

- 1) Interview the customer
- 2) Locate infestations
- 3) Determine the extent of infestations
- 4) Identify conditions conducive to pest proliferation
- 5) Note sanitation and housekeeping

deficiencies

- 6) Identify points of pest entry.

The use of non-chemical measures to prevent and eradicate pest proliferation takes on greater importance in an effective IPM programme in a health care facility. An action plan should be drawn up which outlines the details of measures to be taken, and clearly defines responsibility for these actions. The judicious use of vacuums, steam, heat and traps, including light traps and baits where these will not disturb patients, is essential in eradicating pests.

When the use of chemical measures is the best option, it is prudent to consider the environment within which these will be applied, and to select the most appropriate and least toxic ones, instead of those that we are most familiar with. Rather overestimate, than underestimate the health risks of the chemical measures. Methods of application also require careful thought and planning. In sensitive areas such as operating theatres, control agent treatments should focus on keeping pests from entering. Extensive surface applications of insecticides will primarily be confined to outside perimeter spraying.

Pest control is extremely important in hospitals and other health care facilities. It will, however, test the skills and expertise of the service provider. No cookie cutter programme will work – a well-designed IPM programme which has the full co-operation of the management team at the hospital is essential.

By Riaan Meyer – Pest Control Specialists Group

