

A Triple-Bottom-Line Approach

An Interview with Jon Utech,
Senior Director, Office for a Healthy Environment, Cleveland Clinic

EDITORS' NOTE Jon Utech has held his current post since July of 2013. Prior to this, he was Chief Financial Officer and Executive Vice President of Consulting for Carbon Vision; Manager of Consulting Services with NACCO Industries, Inc.; Consultant for Technician Consulting; and Associate Consultant with Bain and Company. He received his M.S. O.D. and M.B.A. from Case Western Reserve University and his B.A. from Dartmouth College.



Jon Utech

ORGANIZATION BRIEF Cleveland Clinic (clevelandclinic.org) is a nonprofit multispecialty academic medical center that integrates clinical and hospital care with research and education. Located in Cleveland, Ohio, it was founded in 1921 by four renowned physicians with a vision for providing outstanding patient care based upon the principles of cooperation, compassion, and innovation. Cleveland Clinic has pioneered many medical breakthroughs, including coronary artery bypass surgery and the first face transplant in the United States. Among Cleveland Clinic's 49,166 employees are 3,432 full-time salaried physicians and researchers and 14,107 nurses, representing 120 medical specialties and subspecialties.

Will you talk about your role at Cleveland Clinic and how you focus your efforts?

Healthcare is in a time of transitional evolution. This office is in its 10th year of operation so we're firmly rooted in the concept of committing to reducing our environmental impact, and we take a triple-bottom-line approach to that.

We're focused on communicating, understanding, and promoting innovative ways to deliver those amazing healthcare services while transforming our environmental and economic impact.

Healthcare is the second most energy intensive industry after food service. If we can reduce that energy intensity, we can redirect that economic resource towards our primary mission of patient care and keeping our patients healthier.

At the same time, in the Midwest, a fair portion of our energy still comes from coal, so as we use less energy and improve our air quality, it will have a positive impact on the population health of our region.

We want to positively impact environmental, economic, and human health at the same time.

Is energy the primary area of focus?

It's an important one, but there are several different areas we engage in.

For energy, we work with the EPA in the Energy Star program. Other important commitments are to our built environment. As we put up world-class healthcare facilities, we use green building techniques to construct those, and we have 15 buildings and projects that have achieved LEED certification using those green building strategies.

We're now looking at something called the WELLB Standard™, which focuses on how our built environment directly impacts human health, which involves being mindful of air quality and water quality in our spaces, the beauty of our spaces, and providing access to healthy food and exercise.

As a healthcare provider, we want to ultimately make our patients and region healthier, so these strategies impact that.

Our CEO has also committed us to a 50 percent diversion rate in regard to recycling. We're getting close to that goal. Healthcare facilities have about 40 different waste streams and we're trying to find the best possible reuse of those materials or a diversion from landfill to by recycling.

The recycling program affects all 49,000 of our caregivers, and we see this as an opportunity to enhance their experience at work. For younger people entering the workforce, there is an expectation that an organization like Cleveland Clinic is going to promote a program benefitting the environment, and our work fills that growing demand.

A final area of focus is community impact. Sustainability is all about partnerships at all levels including local, state, and federal. More broadly, we have a few specialized committees that we work with to achieve our goals in this regard.

How does the establishment of the Green Revolving Fund tie in with these efforts?

Ultimately, there is a difference between a change initiative and an enduring program that is built to last. We gathered together and designed about a dozen different energy conservation strategies that are as simple as telling our caregivers to turn the lights off when leaving a room.

We have in the past put forth and funded a variety of different energy and conservation strategies, but the Green Fund is an external ongoing commitment to take a portion of our capital and invest it into energy efficiency projects. As those

projects realize savings, we reinvest those savings into additional energy efficiency projects.

In healthcare, there are many competing needs for capital, and energy is one of many needs. This Fund is a signal that we're in this for the long haul. We're committed not only with our intellectual capital and the intelligence and engagement of our caregivers, but this financial commitment shows where our priorities lie.

The Green Fund is a signal to the sector that there is a great business case for doing this and encourages others to do the same. If everyone reduced their energy intensity by 20 percent like we're intending to do, the whole country would be healthier.

How important is it to have the most senior leaders committed to these initiatives?

Dr. Cosgrove's (President and CEO) support is imperative. He's a visionary in many different ways. He created this office because he saw the need for it.

His support is fundamental to getting the range of programs in place. Healthcare is a highly complex and regulated environment, so I am eternally grateful for the vision he had and his ongoing support.

Is it well understood that doing this type of work, while essential, is also good business?

Our CEO, CFO, and COO all have bought into the concept that sustainability has a compelling business case, and that's why we have such a broad set of programs here. At Cleveland Clinic, particularly in the OR, our services are life-saving on a daily basis. That focus and intensity pervades all the work we do. I am honored that every decision has an intensity that feels different and vital.

Beyond our walls, there is a growing recognition of the importance of sustainability. Cleveland Clinic is one of a number of healthcare systems that are doing some really good work in this area. We have a long way to go before senior leaders across healthcare recognize that green doesn't cost money but is a triple-bottom-line benefit.

Sustainability is about stewardship. The healthcare sector is trying to find ways to reinvent itself to be as efficient as possible so sustainability is one of the most important tools to help healthcare solve that equation. As we right-size our materials, reuse what we can, and recycle, we are reinventing healthcare to adapt to a new paradigm of efficiency. It's imperative that we share success stories to accelerate the adoption of these transformative practices. ●