



# GREEN HEALTH CARE CASE STUDY: North East Medical Services

## About North East Medical Services

Where Chinatown meets Little Italy, a progressive health care organization is going green. Since 1971, North East Medical Services (NEMS) has been offering full spectrum clinical services to the low-income, underserved Asian community in San Francisco. Their mission is to provide affordable, comprehensive, compassionate and quality health care services in a linguistically competent and culturally sensitive manner to improve the health and well-being of the community, regardless of ability to pay. [www.nems.org](http://www.nems.org)



## Solid Waste Reduction and Recycling

### RECYCLING:

Through the Teleosis Institute's Green Clinic Assessment, NEMS recognized the potential savings from expanding their solid waste diversion program. NEMS now offers a comprehensive recycling program for used batteries, electronics and cell phones, as well as traditional recyclables including plastic, glass, paper, and aluminum.

### COMPOSTING:

NEMS implemented a compost program in staff lounges, turning biodegradable waste such as food scraps, napkins, and paper take-out containers, into soil for local Bay Area farms and gardens. Composting and recycling can reduce solid waste bills up to 75% in the city of San Francisco by drastically reducing the frequency of garbage services. The estimated annual cost savings for NEMS is \$2,400.

## Why Go Green?

Aiming to provide high-quality health care services, NEMS expanded their focus to include the responsible use of environmental resources in medical practice in 2008, making them leaders in the green health care movement. The vision for greening NEMS is to pass down a safe and healthy community to future generations living in the Chinatown district of San Francisco. Through Teleosis Institute's Green Health Care program, NEMS built a green team, audited their organizational operations, offered clinical and all staff educational seminars, and implemented a number of influential green business practices.

### PAPER REDUCTION:

The heavy reliance on paper in a healthcare setting is an excellent opportunity for clinics to identify seemingly small, but significant steps towards sustainable operations. NEMS made the following commitments to minimize their paper consumption:

- Shift to Electronic Medical Records by 2009, resulting in reduced overhead expenses and an estimated annual savings of \$12,000 per physician.
- Develop a department and organization-wide memo and bulletin board system, eliminating the need for individually printed notices.
- Streamline patient progress notes to a continuous format in dental, ob/gyn and pediatrics.
- Implement a "double-sided" printing policy.
- Offer electronic payroll options for staff.
- Order supplies electronically.

## The Green Team

### COORDINATOR:

Kathleen Sheung,  
Programs/Development

### TEAM MEMBERS

Cordelia Achuck, *Dentist*  
 Jenny Asinc, *Leland/Taraval Assistant manager*  
 Ewana Cheng, *Administrative Assistant*  
 Julia Chiang, *Administration*  
 Andrey Chow, *Programs/Development*  
 Wyland Chu, *Building Manager*  
 Beatrice Huang, *Dentist*  
 Kelly Lee, *OB/GYN*  
 Nara Ng, *HR*



*"It's important we go green to set an example for the community and other health clinics that this is possible."*

— Jonathan Wong, *OB/GYN Physician*

## Water Conservation

NEMS installed automatic water faucet sensors, which have the potential to reduce water waste by up to 50%. In addition, NEMS installed a water cooler in the conference room, eliminating the use of 864 disposable plastic water bottles with an annual savings of:

- **\$1,300.00** (extra cost for bottled water)
- **270 gallons of water** (extra water required for bottle production and purification)
- **87 megajoules of energy** (required for bottle manufacturing)
- **21 gallons of oil** (required to produce plastic bottles)
- **162 pounds of CO2e** (to manufacture plastic bottles)

Estimates were made using the New American Dream Bottled Water Cost Calculator [www.newdream.org/water/calculator.php](http://www.newdream.org/water/calculator.php)

## Pollution Prevention

NEMS focused their pollution prevention efforts in their dental clinic, which provides quality dentistry while emphasizing prevention and regular maintenance. The clinic switched to digital imaging technology which exposes patients to 90% less radiation than x-rays and eliminates the need for toxic x-ray development chemicals. They also use non-toxic cleaners and disinfectants and wax printers to minimize pollution.

## Employee Wellness

Engaging employees and securing buy-in is one of the most critical steps in greening a workplace. Teleosis Institute provided a series of in-service training seminars for health providers, administrators, and staff as part of the Green Health Care Program.

### EDUCATION:

Teleosis offered clinical education sessions on: Sustainable Medicine, Green Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Pollution, and Environmental Justice and Health Care. Additionally, Teleosis offered monthly education sessions for support staff, teaching the fundamentals of sustainability and reviewing active greening projects at the clinic. To spread the word on green initiatives, the NEMS Green Team developed the Green Sharepoint website where tips, carpool information, and updates on greening projects are posted for all to see.

### A GREENER BODY:

NEMS employees are encouraged to get physically fit by using the new sixth floor "mini-gym" which offers employees an opportunity to exercise during the workday.

*"I joined the Green Team for my kids. I wanted to learn more about what I can do personally and professionally to leave this planet a better place. NEMS is part of this community and part of this planet. We need to do whatever we can to reduce our carbon footprint."*

— Cordelia Achuck, Dentist and Co-Dental Director

## Population Served in 2007:

- Total Patients: **37,078**
- Total Encounters: **196,191**
- Percent of Patients who are Uninsured: **53%**
- Percent of Patients who are 100% or below Poverty: **60%**
- Percent of Patients who are Asian: **96%**
- Percent of Patients who are Elderly (65+): **17%**
- Percent of Patients who speak little or no English: **86%**

## Languages Provided:

Cantonese, Mandarin, Toishan, Vietnamese, Burmese, and Korean.

## Green Health Care: A Model of Improved Environmental and Human Health

*Green Health Care offers practical assistance for transforming theory and research into action. Contact us to create your ideal Green Health Care Center! The Teleosis Institute's Green Health Care Program is a custom-tailored service to address environmental sustainability in clinical practice. Our leadership training and services include: Clinic Assessment, Green Team Building and Action Plans, Environmental Health Education Workshops and the Green Pharmacy Program. A program of Practice Greenhealth, Teleosis is a non-profit organization dedicated to reducing healthcare's environmental footprint by developing effective, sustainable health care programs provided by professionals who serve as environmental health stewards.*



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