

Surgical Wraps Transformed for the Homeless

The surgical staff at OSF HealthCare Saint James – John W. Albrecht Medical Center has seen its share of stiches and sutures. But now, the stitching is happening in the break room – with the help of a few sewing machines and one great idea.

After surgical instruments have been sterilized, the tray is wrapped until needed. The waterproof cloth wraps are then thrown away after the tray is used, creating a large amount of waste.

“This is a big waste, because we will use four to ten in a case. And then we just throw them away,” said Rachel Mattingly, Surgical Tech, OSF Saint James Medical Center.

After seeing the vast amount of waste the tray wraps created Mattingly brought an idea to her team. A way to reuse the wraps and help the community at the same time.

“We take our used mats, or our used wraps that we wrap our instruments in, and we sew them together and we make waterproof mats for homeless people and animal shelters,” she explained.

The mats will provide a waterproof place to sit, or a respite from the weather for those who need it most.

In three weeks the surgical services team had collected dozens of wraps. They spent an afternoon making the recycled mats, by stitching two wraps together for each one.

The Livingston County Humane Society has been the first organization to open its doors to the revised wraps, and OSF Saint James staff is reaching out to other social services organizations like the Salvation Army, to see if they have a need for the mats as well.

“I know there is a large homeless population, and I know in the summer, the homeless shelters aren’t open in the summer,” said Mattingly. “And it rains in the summer, and they need someplace to put their things in it, they can lay on it.”

Surgical supervisor Elizabeth Diemer says she is proud of the team, and hopes their efforts expand in the future.

“If we meet the needs of our county, we’d like to just extend it to other counties around us and maybe Bloomington will start doing the same thing, and we can just keep serving our communities,” said Diemer.

The surgical services team created 40 mats on day one of their effort. Mattingly says they should be able to collect enough surgical tray wraps to keep them steadily stitching for months to come.