Commissioning: New Hospital Guidelines are Building the Road to a Healthier Future

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Marketing Coordinator, Beaudin Ganze Consulting Engineers, Inc. (BGCE) for engineering and commissioning services to design sustainable and energy-efficient facilities that assure the health and safety of staff and patients. BGCE Professional Engineer Brad Staver has been in the health care commissioning field for more than five years and works on a variety of hospital infrastructure projects. Today, Staver explains some of the new standards of commissioning that hospitals began to adopt in recent years and what’s on the horizon for health care facilities.

Q: How have commissioning standards changed for health care facilities in recent years? A: Within the past few years (in 2010), they’ve actually changed the health care guidelines to make it mandatory for health care facilities to be commissioned, and the guideline dictates what kind of facilities have to be commissioned. Those guidelines haven’t been adopted by all hospitals yet, but they have been published.

I anticipate the majority of hospitals in our region will adopt that guideline within the next five to 10 years.

Q: Are you in favor of these new guidelines? A: I think it’s a great idea. Obviously, being in the field of commissioning, it helps that hospitals now have a guideline to follow. Those guidelines are also going to apply for hospitals that undergo renovation projects. Hospitals have been commissioning for a number of years, and the new guidelines prove that they value the benefits of commissioning. Hospitals that have commissioning know that they will have a truly operable and sustainable building for years to come. The guidelines designate standards and what systems are important to be commissioned including HVAC, lighting control systems, medical gasses and fire alarm systems.

Q: Do you find that owners of health care facilities are submitting plans for new projects independently, or is it a more collaborative effort? A: It’s definitely more of a collaborative effort then it’s been in the past. Design teams aren’t just throwing plans over the wall to have the contractors bid a project, go out and build it right away. A lot of the time, contractors are brought in early during the schematic phases of the project to make sure that everyone involved understands the goals of the project. I find that involving contractors early on makes the entire process a lot smoother.

Q: In recent years, have you noticed that health care leaders who hire BGCE prefer facilities that have the potential for adaptive reuse, such as small health care facilities in strip malls or Urgent Care offices, or are you seeing more plans for large-scale hospitals in urban areas? A: Most of the work that we’ve been involved with has been at the hospital level rather than the Urgent Care type of facilities. Even medical office buildings don’t necessarily fall under the same guidelines that I mentioned earlier as hospitals. Commissioning needs largely depend on the type of facility we’re working on. We can definitely work in either setting. I would like to see more medical office buildings going the commissioning route, but due to the complex systems the most critical need for commissioning is in the hospitals themselves.

Q: What kinds of complex systems do commissioning professionals support? A: In hospitals, we assist with infectious control, pressure relationships and surgery suites; there are a lot of components that go into those systems to ensure that they’re all working properly. There are new techniques in commissioning and everyone in the industry is consistently improving their skills as time goes on to ensure that hospitals operate better.

Q: How often do you work on commissioning or renovation projects for existing health care facilities? A: Most are existing facilities; they’re either doing a remodel or addition. I’m currently working on commissioning projects for existing facilities including the Campbell County Memorial Hospital in Gillette, Wyo.; Jvinson Memorial Hospital in Laramie, Wyo.; and St. Mary’s Hospital in Grand Junction, Colo. We’re currently working on the chiller upgrade to contribute to the cooling infrastructure of the facility.