

# Sustainability in Health Care – It Starts with Leadership

## Leadership Talks, Walks and Envisions a Healthier Future



**Jeffrey Thompson, MD**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Gundersen Health System



*“At Gundersen Health System, we believe healthcare organizations need to be honest with themselves and ‘look in the mirror’ when it comes to environmental factors that affect human disease.”*

### Leadership Talks:

“At Gundersen Health System, we believe healthcare organizations need to be honest with themselves and ‘look in the mirror’ when it comes to environmental factors that affect human disease. Our mission is to improve the health of the communities we serve, and we cannot accomplish this mission without looking at our organization’s environmental impact and how that contributes to disease. Through our Envision® program, we’ve taken a look in the mirror and are taking steps that will have an impact on the health of our communities—such as improving our energy efficiency 25 percent, increasing our renewable energy supply, 100% improvement of our pharmaceutical and hazardous waste, a commitment to recycling that’s led to a 35 percent recycling and reuse rate of the solid waste stream. We believe healthcare’s core principle of striving to ‘cause no harm’ relates to environmental contributors to disease. The best part is that we can achieve this mission while, at the same time, reducing the cost to deliver care by passing along savings we see from our sustainability programs.” Jeffrey Thompson, MD, CEO, Gundersen Health System.

### Leadership Walks

- Created key roles in the organization, including a sustainability coordinator and two engineering leaders to manage our technical projects.
- Incorporated energy conservations

measures that have led to a more than 25 percent improvement in energy efficiency and more than \$1 million in annual savings on a \$2 million dollar investment.

- Set organizational goal of being 100 percent energy independent by 2014, meaning we will produce as much renewable energy as the energy we use.
  - Created baseline measures and charts to track our progress. Have seen visible results since implementing energy program in 2008.
  - We will be spending less on our energy costs and will be able to pass the savings along to patients in the form of lower healthcare costs, which links to our strategic plan for reducing the cost of care.
- Created Gundersen Envision, LLC to house our renewable energy projects. A subsidiary of Gundersen, the Envision, LLC, has a governing board of directors, a budget to support capital investments needed to achieve the energy independence goal and executive leadership support.
- Developed an Internal / External communication and marketing plan to allow others to learn from our successes. Includes case studies, media relations support and promotional materials.
- Commitment to design all new buildings with benchmark levels of energy intensity and become LEED certified.
- Developed partnerships with local businesses and government agencies, including a brewery, agriculture organi-

zation and county agency, for renewable energy projects.

- Developed “Energy Check-Up” program to assist other healthcare organizations in uncovering energy conservation opportunities at their organization.
- Implemented a Styrofoam elimination program in all Gundersen facilities.
- Implemented a food waste reduction program that has led to a 50 percent improvement in food waste. A by-product of the program was the development of a food donation program to a local charity organization. More than 1,000 meals a month are donated rather than being thrown away.
- Commitment to buying local foods whenever possible and practical to do so. One of the founding members of the 5th Season Food Cooperative in western Wisconsin.

### Leadership Envisions

- Energy Independent by 2014 – 100% renewables that we own.
- Continue to partner across our region to encourage and help build healthier, more sustainable communities.
- Gundersen will be a national model for Sustainable Healthcare that works with other systems to help teach the healthcare sector how to build their systems.

