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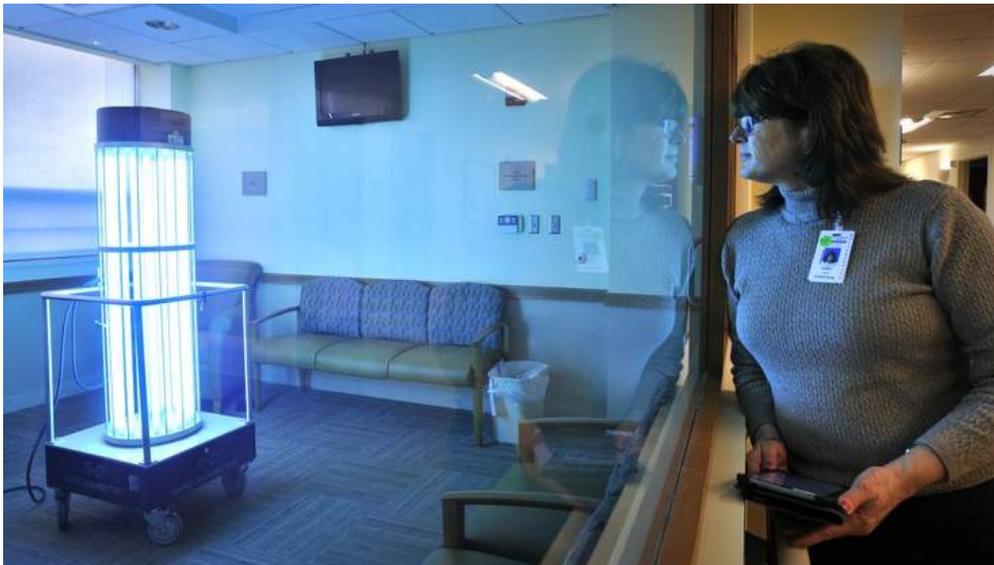
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Monday, March 31, 2014

## 'Cootie cutter' zaps nasty micro-organisms



Debra Deary, supervisor of environmental services at Harrington Hospital in Southbridge, demonstrates the hospital's new "Rapid Disinfecter" at the hospital last week. A contest to name the machine ends today. (T&G Staff/PAUL KAPTEYN)

By **Brian Lee TELEGRAM & GAZETTE STAFF**  
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SOUTHBRIDGE — Harrington Hospital's newest employee doesn't have a name, but it can brighten up any room — and disinfect it, to boot.

For the past four weeks, the Southbridge hospital's environmental services unit has been using a nearly 6-foot-tall, 216-pound "Rapid Disinfecter," a robot whose ultraviolet light from 20 lamps destroys hard-to-kill microorganisms.

The rays penetrate the organisms' cell membranes and destroy their DNA so they can't replicate, said Sue Valentine, infection prevention specialist at Harrington.

The robot's UV light kills 99.9 percent of bacteria, mold spores, algae, protozoa, viruses, and yeast.

Harrington bought the \$60,000 machine from Steriliz



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UV technology has been used for a long time for different things such as treating water, but has only been used for disinfecting hospital settings about three years, Ms. Valentine said.

St. Vincent Hospital of Worcester is looking into acquiring one of these machines, according to spokeswoman Beth Donnelly.

Rob Brogna, a spokesman for UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, said that organization acquired a similar machine two weeks ago, and it has been up and running for several days at the University Campus.

"Hospital-acquired infections are a very real issue and we feel that we should be taking every opportunity to kill multi-drug resistant organisms such as MRSA (methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus) and C-diff (which can cause symptoms ranging from diarrhea to life-threatening inflammation of the colon)," he said in an email.

Ms. Valentine of Harrington said C-diff is an intestinal infection people get as a result of antibiotic use that can destroy normal, healthy bacteria. According to the Mayo Clinic, C. difficile bacteria can result in spores that are extremely hard to kill and can live for many months on surfaces and equipment, in nooks and crannies, under beds and around sinks.

Ross Anderson, Harrington's director of environmental services, said the machine hasn't rendered bleach wipes obsolete.

It doesn't take the place of regular cleaning; it's an additional layer of cleaning, he said.

To demonstrate how it worked, Mr. Anderson placed four wireless sensors throughout a room and vacated it.

The sensors provided a real-time job status on a handheld Samsung tablet. Once each of the sensors produced a reading on the tablet of 46,000 units of light, the job was complete.

Another sensor, placed on the exterior door, turns the machine off in case someone opens the door while the machine is still cleaning, he said. To a person re-entering the room, it smelled similar to a tanning booth.

Harrington is using the robot in rooms in which a recently discharged patient had any type of bacteria, virus or sore.

It is being used to the tune of 50 treatments per week, Mr. Ross said.

It is used in operating rooms as part of end-of-day cleaning, rooms in the intensive care unit, and as needed elsewhere, the officials said.

John Shevlin, an evening environmental services supervisor at Harrington, said he used the machine last week in an office cubicle setting in which an employee had been ill.

It will also be used periodically in high-traffic public areas such as waiting rooms, offices and charting areas. Also, equipment such as wheelchairs will be rounded up and treated with the machine, the Harrington officials said.

Ms. Valentine said the machine wasn't something the hospital budgeted for, but sought after noticing an increasing number of patients entering the hospital from rehab or long term facilities with highly resistant multidrug-resistant organisms.

Harrington doesn't have a problem with infections, she said, but she called this "bio-vigilance" for patients, employees and staff.

Harrington Auxiliary donated \$4,500 in seed money, Ms. Valentine said.

Ms. Valentine said the hospital is running a contest through March to name the robot.

Suggestions may be submitted through Harrington's Facebook page; ballots are also available in the hospital. "Violet," "Hazel," and "Cootie cutter" were among the names already suggested by contestants.

Because the housekeeping department did "an awesome job" putting the robot into service, it will choose the winner, who will receive a gift card, Ms. Valentine said.

Contact Brian Lee at [brian.lee@telegram.com](mailto:brian.lee@telegram.com)

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