

# Fashion meets function

Model G gown solves age-old patient privacy problem *By Kathleen Hall*



The Model G gown is the answer to every patient's shared humiliation: an exposed backside when wearing a standard-issue hospital gown.

Patients who have experienced this lack of privacy firsthand have no doubt wondered, "Why is this still a problem?"

The answer is more complicated than you might expect.

"There are a lot of barriers to overcome to design something that works in a system such as a hospital," says Scott Dulchavsky, M.D., Ph.D. and CEO of the Henry Ford Innovation Institute and chairman of surgery and surgeon in chief at Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit, Michigan. "You have to address clinical needs, patient needs and laundry needs. Hospital gowns go through a tremendous amount of wear and tear in the laundry process. There are a lot of challenges [in a redesign]."

The journey to create the Model G patient gown illustrates the obstacles of bringing a new healthcare product to market. A team of clinicians, product designers and licensing engineers at the Henry Ford Innovation Institute elected to revamp the hospital gown to improve the dignity and experience of patients in healthcare. Their solution was the Model G, a gown designed with both patients and healthcare professionals in mind.

## More privacy leads to better outcomes

Hospital gowns provide standardized, uncompromised access to patients for healthcare professionals who need to administer IVs, conduct medical procedures and check vitals. For patients, however, they can create a drafty, embarrassing and awkward experience — usually at a time when they are most vulnerable. A gown that offers privacy is a big step forward.

"Privacy in the back of the gown is a key innovation of the Model G," says Mark Coticchia, Henry Ford's vice president and chief innovation officer. However, it's about more than just making patients feel comfortable, as increased privacy contributes to better, faster recoveries. "Early ambulation is key to patients' early release from the hospital," Coticchia says. With the traditional flimsy, tied-back gowns, patients were reluctant to walk around outside their rooms.

The Model G gown has an elongated slot in the back with overlapping edges, combining the privacy patients desire with the ease of access healthcare providers require.

"This encourages patients to ambulate earlier, but still provides uncompromised clinical access for practitioners," says Michael Forbes, product designer and licensing associate.

The Model G fits better than the traditional gown, as well. Instead

of an awkward one-size-fits-all, the Model G is styled after a wraparound robe, with two rows of snaps that allow patients to adjust the gown's fit based on their size. In addition, Forbes says the Model G is a little softer and warmer and a lot more attractive than traditional patient gowns.

"Earlier versions of the gown had a lapel," Forbes says. "Through research, we realized this was not a feasible feature because hospitals were not going to press or iron each gown each time they used them."

The team added a high-contrast color to imply a collar instead. "This helps separate the Model G from the old, stereotypical gown," Forbes says. "It shifts patients' perspective. They instantly know they are wearing something new."

#### **Efficiency, cost savings and a better patient experience**

An important feature of the Model G is the shoulder snaps, which make it compatible with any IV protocol in the hospital. When a traditional hospital gown becomes soiled, a healthcare professional must remove the IV before the patient can change gowns. Now, with snaps on the shoulders, patients can change gowns without disrupting their IVs.

"Hospitals usually have at least two versions of gowns for different purposes," Coticchia says. "Although they seem similar to patients, they are different. However, 75 to 80 percent of patients are wearing these old IV gowns. The Model G covers more patients with one gown, so hospitals do not have a large inventory of unused gowns."

Patients may not notice another small-but-significant feature: the snaps are made of plastic, not metal. Patients who needed an MRI previously had to


change into a gown without snaps, but the Model G is MRI compatible.

To gain much-desired privacy with traditional gowns, many patients choose to wear two gowns – one worn the normal way and another worn backward, Coticchia says. "Patients used two of one product to do the same thing as the Model G does. So a hospital can spend slightly more for the Model G, significantly improve patients' experience and reduce waste," he says.

#### **National roll out**

Patients at the Henry Ford medical centers were the first to enjoy the Model G — and by all accounts, it's been a hit. Still, there are always challenges when you attempt to roll out any new product, service or technology in healthcare, Dulchavsky says.

"It was vital to have employee



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buy-in and engagement during the Model G design," he says. "We sought to understand each department's challenges and designed the features to overcome those challenges."

Now, Medline is manufacturing, marketing and distributing the Model G to hospitals nationwide.

Although the original Model G was designed in navy and light blue to reflect the Henry Ford Health System brand, hospitals can order the gowns in any color.

"The Model G gown meets Medline's requirements in function and comfort, durability, ease of care and value, and provides an innovative solution to improve the patient experience," says Tim Abate, textiles division president at Medline. "We are proud to be a provider of the Model G gowns to hospitals and healthcare providers."

For more information about the Model G patient gown, or to receive a sample, contact your Medline representative. ■