



Chela Zabin

Dominican Hospital's Carol George displays some of the items available at Domin-Again, which offers free surplus hospital supplies.

Domin-Again

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Dominican 'store' salvages unwanted hospital supplies destined for landfill

By CHELA ZABIN
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A couple of months ago, all the items on the shelves of Domin-Again were headed to the landfill. Now, the discarded scrub brushes, surgery drapes, empty saline bottles, plastic trays and tubs are hot sellers at the little store on Mission Drive.

Actually, "hot sellers" is a bit of a misnomer, since the products aren't sold, but given away. The whole idea of the store, which is staffed on a volunteer basis by employees of Dominican Santa Cruz Hospital and is open only on Sundays from 1 to 3 p.m., is to find people who can use items that otherwise would be thrown out.

"This is a service to the public," said Carol George, manager of the hospital's information services program and a key player in establishing the store. "It helps keep us from throwing these things in the landfill, where they'll sit and won't decompose."

A member of the hospital's ecology task force, George had been working on the hospital's recycling program for some time. But employees realized that it's always better to re-use than to recycle, she said, and they hit on the idea of the store

as another way to reduce hospital waste.

The store was set up in a garage behind a former pathology lab, at 3151 Mission Drive, that had been purchased by the hospital. Employees cleaned and painted the garage, came up with the store name, and furnished it with unwanted items. Probably the only thing that had to be paid for, George said, was having a phone installed.

The ecology task force has representatives from nearly every hospital department, all of whom keep their eyes peeled for reusable items. Employees and hospital volunteers keep the shelves stocked and run the store.

"It's entirely a volunteer effort," George said.

Many of the items come from surgery kits that are pre-packaged and are wrapped and sterilized. Not every surgery requires every tool or piece of equipment in the package, meaning that perfectly good tubs, tubing, wipes and trays were being thrown out.

These days, the soft brushes surgeons use to scrub their hands are finding a new life as spa scrubs or vegetable brushes. Surgical drapes have

become tarps for painting projects. Sturdy foam pads used to hold metal surgical tools are being used by gardeners to kneel on as they work their flowerbeds. Teachers are using 2-oz. specimen jars for kids' poster paints.

The store also features strong cardboard boxes and styrofoam "peanuts" for packing, slightly used 9-volt batteries from temporary pace makers — advertised as having "lots of life left" — copper wiring, plastic tubing, plastic food bins and 4- and 5-gallon plastic buckets.

Stocks are a little low right now, George said, because of a recent grand opening for hospital employees that attracted 300.

George said she asked employees to limit their "purchases" so there'd be something left for everyone, but she won't limit what people take in the future.

Which means that shelves will be empty sometimes, since the store can't exactly order supplies. She suggests people call the store at 464-7520 before coming in if they are looking for a particular item. Phone messages will be returned within a week, she said.