



CASE STUDY

NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde – Segregating Waste in Theatres

FOCUS AREA

Healthcare facilities and services produce tons of waste every day. Waste therefore offers many opportunities for us to significantly shrink our environmental footprint by minimising or eliminating the generation of waste at the source, segregating ordinary waste from infectious waste and diverting recyclable waste from the solid waste stream.



WASTE

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BACKGROUND AND AIMS

Until recently, standard practice across NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde in operating theatres, was to place all waste items into the Clinical Waste stream. Although this guarantees no incorrect segmentation of waste, this practice is not only highly inefficient in terms of resource use (as recyclable materials cannot be recovered) and it is also highly expensive for the board to dispose of; clinical waste is up to 4 to 5 times the cost of general waste and 7 to 8 times the cost of recycling.





ACTIONS

Separate waste streams were introduced into theatres in response to requests from key staff in theatres at one hospital site. Staff had expressed frustration with colleagues putting recyclable or non-recyclable material in the clinical waste stream; this included items such as paper, card, wrappers and other clean, sterile materials. The use of clear waste bags as an infection control measure highlighted this practice.

The introduction of a separate general waste collection into theatres was relatively simple and easy, but did require a number of factors to be considered to ensure success; perhaps the most important of which (barring the actual introduction of separate bins and setting up of collection routines with facilities teams) was the presence of a clinical staff member to take a lead on the change – in this case it was the nurse in charge.

This helped in:

- Giving ownership of the practice of segregating waste to those in the setting
- Reviewing the waste that was produced in that setting and clarifying what could go in a clinical waste bin and what could go into a general waste bin – some of these weren't obvious!
- Briefing colleagues on the changes and reminding them to source segregate
- Considering the location of new bins: Bins had to be placed to ensure that they were not blocking walkways or clinical operations, and also be easy to access for staff to encourage use.

Posters and signage were also developed using the Sustainability Action branding to reinforce and raise the profile of the change. To embed this practice, the Board has also developed a policy document that standardises this practice across the estate and includes key factors such as: identifying those with responsibility in each location, highlighting the need for staff instruction and education on this practice and guidance for on-site waste management.

KEY IMPACTS

The project was initially trialled between July and November 2018 in ophthalmic operating theatres in Stobhill hospital and waste was closely monitored to explore the impact. This generated a predicted annual saving for these theatres alone of (based on actual part-year figures) of approximately £11,000.

NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde's longer-term aim is to offer recycling in anaesthetic rooms and theatre prep areas with mobile bins which will allow them to be taken into the theatre environment and then removed before a procedure is started.

LESSONS

Although there were some concerns by staff in advance of the change, the process was straightforward and readily accepted by staff: "there were no issues from day one". It was clear that staff on site are ready to see waste being segregated, and to participate in doing so.

This smooth transition was enabled by ensuring that there was buy-in from the staff teams working on site and through having someone in situ that can promote the new practice and give guidance over queries.

