Sheffield Children’s NHS Foundation Trust

Reducing the use of medications which affect the environment

Topic Area(s):

* Medicines;

Please specify your project approach:

Both adaptation and mitigation

Key message / aim:

The medication supply chain is one of the most impactful contributors to the sustainability of health care. Trying to limit the use of some of the most harmful ones to the environment will be a positive step in the right direction, such as nitrous gas.

What was the problem?

Often some medication can be over-used leading to huge impacts on supply chain demand, once these medicines become back in-stock AHP’s and other medical professions feel the need to use them even though it’s possible to use a more sustainable alternative showing there’s no awareness on sustainable impact.

What was the solution?

AHPs may prevent this by advising patients against unnecessary prescriptions and enforcing behaviours which reduces the risk of hospital admission. Also, extra training to be given out to prevent the overuse of certain drugs were not medically necessary. ODPs especially could advise clinical staff about the harmful effects of Desflurane and Nitrous gas to the atmosphere and how it could affect patients health risks in the future which could lead to further admission.

What were the challenges?

Many anaesthetics are traditionally only used to enhance patient care, the idea of reducing or limiting certain anaesthetic drugs may lead to medical professionals feeling like there not giving patient centred care. Challenging the over use of prescriptions may reduce overall healthcare standards.

What were the results/Impact?

Patient outcomes:

Some patients may not receive this well and may not like to hear small changes they can make to improve their health in the future however as a long term affect it will improve their health.

Population outcomes:

It will increase the populations health as less hospital admissions leads to less ambulance journeys which contribute to air quality and less medication will be needed to be produced leading to less greenhouse gas production.

Environmental impact:

Will help the NHS become more sustainable by limiting medications including nitrous gases, improving patient health and less admissions.

Social impact:

Could result in dispute between health care professions if they feel as if patient care isn’t optimized.

Financial impacts:

Time of the training of AHP’s requires them to take time out of their current positions to complete training meaning extra staff on shifts will be required. Restricting some medication may lead to a more expensive alternate and could increase the demand on services if improperly managed.

What were the learning points?

This needs to be approached by demonstrating that environmental factors will impact everyone’s future so it will improve long term health and therefore falls under patient care.

Next steps

The sourcing of energy for diagnostic and therapeutic radiography needs to be improved, needs to build a cost model. There needs to be a point where you balance the change over of equipment and the energy efficiency (both are associated with climate problems).

Want to know more?

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Has this case study or story been made public in any form before?No

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