

Task & Finish group review of bedside disposable curtains in the interest of sustainability

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Introduction

Like most other acute Trusts within the UK, this acute tertiary hospital Trust currently uses disposable polypropylene curtains for all in-patient beds (n = 1900), outpatients and theatres. This equates to a procurement spend of £100K per annum and 12,000 kg of waste a year, costing around £4,000. The initial rationale for moving to disposable curtains were likely influenced by the reduction targets for MRSA and *Clostridioides difficile* and industry claims that they were easier to hang, use and change. However, this has led to a linear economy model with direct effects on sustainability, planetary health against a change that had little evidence of impact in relation to patient safety.



Methods

A task and finish group was launched by the Senior Matron for IPC. Membership included facilities, housekeeping, laundry, clinical procurement, clinical staff, waste and sustainability leads. The first meeting was well attended and very positive with input from all staff within the group. The purpose was to evaluate whether switching from disposable curtains to reusable, was practical, safe, sustainable and cost effective. Initially, reusable linen curtains were evaluated. It was then agreed to trial a reusable wipeable PVC curtain (Yewdale) on an inpatient ward for two weeks. Both nursing and housekeeping staff completed evaluation forms.

Task & Finish group – alternatives to disposable curtains

Results

Linen curtains were noted to be heavy to change, and hang. Linen curtains can also lose their shape during the laundry and drying processes. A trial was initiated with washing the linen curtains at the Trust's own laundry. The trial showed that it took four people, rather than one person, to load the curtain into the machinery. Therefore, laundering linen based curtains at the Trust was not a viable option. There would also be storage issues for linen curtains. Next, the Trust evaluated the Yewdale wipeable curtain. These curtains are guaranteed for ten years and pay for themselves after five years. After ten years the Trust could save half a million pounds. Nine evaluations were reviewed, and results displayed as Pie charts below. A word cloud was also made from comments

Conclusions

Engagement from key stakeholders has been very encouraging. The wipeable curtain has been received well, although it is a paradigm shift from what some staff are used to. Advantages of the wipeable curtain are reduced procurement, reduced transport, and reduction in housekeeper time to change disposable curtains. There are no storage issues and a big reduction in waste. Next steps include visiting hospital sites that already have the wipeable curtain. The trial would then be extended to other sites in the Trust. Results will also be shared with the Circular Economy Network highlighting the sustainability benefits.

