

Plastic waste in healthcare – What is happening Internationally

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Ending Plastic Waste Symposium 2024

- The global medical plastics market is currently worth US\$22.26 billion, or 2% of total plastics production by value, and is growing by 6.1% per year.
 - 15 million tonnes per annum of single use plastics in healthcare
- Issues
 - Healthcare supply chains are strongly linked to the linear economy
 - Overpackaging – relates to non-clinical products as well
 - Design
 - Management systems combines plastic types
 - More biodegradable mixed with other types
 - Links to infection prevention, - not always justified/validated

Many innovative approaches but no widespread adoption

Most examples led by individuals

Examples include:

- Procedure specific theatre packs
- Reducing packaging – use of stainless steel boxes
- Reusable equipment such as trays
- Changing from single use to reusable sharps containers

Need more requirements for adoption as not seen as an important issue as yet by those who could expedite change

NHS UK

- Health and Care Act 2022
- Requirement for providers of NHS services to meet targets
- 10% reduction in clinical single-use plastics in the short term

USA

- Several aid agencies focusing on reducing plastic such as with packaging

Denmark

- Center for Sustainable Hospitals
- Work with suppliers to develop solutions
- Packaging improvements
- More producer responsibility actions

Reported Main Barriers to Circular Economy



- Perceived convenience of single-use
- Safety concerns
- Concerns over infection risks (unsubstantiated)
 - *There exists no compelling evidence that using single-use disposables reduce health care-acquired infections*
- Financial limitations
- Lack of awareness – hospital staff, recyclers, regulators
- Need for life cycle analysis of options

- Need to mandate in accreditation
- Evidence based reference to infection prevention issues
- Schemes to reduce potential liability issues from reprocessing and reuse of items labelled “single use”
- Need to identify polymers used in packaging – don’t just swap the problem
- Purchasing policies enforced
- Shift to home based healthcare can increase plastic use

- Data – types and markets (Healthcare/Domestic)
- Training, monitoring, auditing, and reporting
- Procurement
- Better identification of plastic type
- Discuss with supplier – not just recycler
- Extended Producer Responsibility – apply to producer/seller
- Clarity from Regulators
- Need coordinated approach – all “players” involved

Quote by Bob Brown

“Why criticise those who are doing something, keep criticism for those not doing anything”