

Case study: Reducing single-use plastics in patient and staff catering at Newcastle Hospitals

Introduction

The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has provided patient-centred healthcare to communities in the North East of England and beyond for over 250 years:

- 1.72 million patient contacts a year
- Serve a population of over 3 million
- Over 14,000 staff
- Over 2,250 beds
- £1 billion turnover

In 2017 a decision was made to bring about a joined-up approach to food and catering provision between the trust's two main hospital sites: Freeman Hospital and the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI). This was as an exciting opportunity for the Catering Manager to expand the environmental changes already implemented at the Freeman Hospital.

Baseline

Looking at the difference in procurement practice between the RVI and Freeman Hospital catering teams, the opportunity to remove a number of disposable plastic items at the RVI was identified.

Patient Catering

The following items were identified as single-use plastics of interest in patient meal provision:

- Bowls and lids
- Side plates
- Cutlery
- Straws

Staff Bistro

The following items were identified as single-use plastics of interest in the RVI staff Bistro:

- Polystyrene boxes
- Cutlery
- Stirrers
- Coffee cups

Output

Headline: in patient catering, actions have removed over 1.9 million items from being disposed of annually and saved £68k in the first year.

Patient Catering

The initial outlay for the reusable cutlery, bowls, lids and side plates was £12k; and the savings which will be achieved are £80K annually. This is a payback of just 2 months. It has also removed the following items from being disposed of annually (on average):

- 513,600 disposable polypropylene bowls
- 490,800 disposable polypropylene lids for bowls
- 312,000 polystyrene bowls
- 371,000 plastic spoons
- 216,000 plastic knives

Staff Bistro

In 2018/19 the following items were used in place of single-use plastic alternatives:

- 43,000 wooden cutleries in place of plastic cutlery (introduced in July 2018)
- 22,000 biodegradable coffee cups in place of petroleum derived plastic-lined cups
- 10,000 wooden stirrers in place of plastic stirrers
- 4,900 bagasse (sugarcane) take away boxes in place of polystyrene boxes
- 1,435 reusable coffee cups used in place of disposable cups (introduced in May 2018)

How?

Two different approaches were taken between patient catering and staff catering due to contractual limitations with the PFI:

- a number of disposable items replaced with reusable alternatives in patient catering
- single-use plastics replaced with other disposable alternatives in the staff bistro

Patient Catering

- Wards received reusable plates, bowls and cutlery for use at breakfast time which stay on the ward and are washed by the ward themselves.
- Plastic straws were 'masked' on NHS Supply Chain and wards can only order them if they have a clinical need.
- All wards were sent a letter explaining the changes to provision/ordering, and the reasons for reducing plastic.
- Bowls used for soups and deserts on patient trays were changed from disposable plastic to a reusable melamine bowl, with a reusable lid.

Staff Bistro

- Changed disposable coffee cups from catering outlets to a biodegradable alternative.
- Reusable rice husk coffee cups for sale in our catering outlets and a 25p discount on hot drinks when people use any reusable cup.
- Replaced plastic disposable cutlery with wooden disposable cutlery in catering outlets.
- Removed polystyrene and plastic based take away containers and replaced with a bagasse (sugarcane) alternative.

Next steps

- Work with our PFI outlets to improve recycling and reduce single-use plastics in their areas.
- Investigate the impact of replacing plastic bottles with cans.
- Develop a single-use plastic audit for wards and departments to self-assess.