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Medical Equipment Management and Sustainability Practices

I am contacting you on behalf of Youth MedAid London as part of an initiative to explore and assess sustainable practices within NHS trusts. Our focus includes understanding procurement, inventory management, and disposal practices for medical equipment, with particular attention to environmental impact and sustainability efforts. We aim to compile this information for analysis and to promote awareness of sustainable healthcare practices.

Please find the details of our request below. We have provided structured response options where applicable to ensure consistency and ease of analysis.

For this request, "medical equipment" refers to any reusable or single-use tools, devices, or machinery utilized in patient care, diagnosis, treatment, or monitoring. This includes, but is not limited to, items such as surgical instruments, diagnostic devices (e.g., stethoscopes, ultrasound machines), monitoring equipment (e.g., ECG machines, blood pressure monitors), and imaging machines (e.g., MRI, X-ray, CT scanners).

SECTION 1: Hospital Demographics

1. Please indicate your trust/hospital type and type of care:

a. Trust/Hospital Type:

- i. Acute ✓
- ii. Mental Health ✓
- iii. Community ✓
- iv. ~~Ambulance~~
- v. Other (please specify) community mental health

b. Type of Care:

- i. Secondary ✓
- ii. Tertiary
- iii. Other (please specify)

2. Total Number of Beds: Please indicate the total number of inpatient beds in your hospital, including all types (e.g., general, ICU, maternity) if applicable.

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There were 1,731 inpatient beds open in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust on the 19th November 2024 (including ICU, mental health and maternity inpatient beds and excluding Muckamore Abbey).

3. ICU/ITU Bed Count: How many beds are designated for intensive or high-dependency care?

There were 70 ICU beds open in Belfast HSC Trust on the 19th November 2024

4. Annual Admissions: Please provide the total number of patient admissions in the last calendar year. If exact figures are unavailable, please provide your best estimate.

There were 72,428 inpatient admissions in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in 2023. This does not include day cases.

SECTION 2: Procurement and Inventory Management

1. Formal Procurement Policies: Does your hospital have formal policies or guidelines for medical equipment procurement?

- **Yes (please provide a copy or summary)**
- **No**

Yes- The Trust doesn't have a standalone policy on procurement but there is guidance within the Trust's *Medical Devices Procedures & Guidelines, Section 2* (Procurement), provided with this response.

2. Designated Procurement Roles: Is there a designated individual or team responsible for managing the procurement of medical equipment? If yes, please provide the role(s) and a brief description of responsibilities.

- **Yes – Individual**
- **Yes – Team**
- **No**

No- There is no central procurement team but this would be done on an ad hoc basis by clinical teams or technical support teams. Depending on the size of the purchases being made it might involve senior members of staff and/or task-and-finish groups but generally it would be done by DEC's (Departmental Equipment Controllers, those experienced staff responsible for all aspects of equipment management within their own service/location). They would usually be a ward or department manager or deputy. See *Procedures & Guidelines* for further details.

3. Inventory Review Frequency: How often is your medical equipment inventory reviewed for excess or unused items?

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- **Monthly**
- **Quarterly**
- **Biannually**
- **Annually**
- **Other (please specify)**

Other- This is not done centrally, but the individual DEC's or managers would be expected to review their local inventory on a periodic basis. We are not prescriptive about how often this should be done, but it should be at least once per year and when equipment is added or removed.

4. Primary Sources for Procurement: What are the primary sources for your medical equipment procurement? Please indicate the proportion sourced from the NHS supply chain versus individual suppliers, and provide any additional details as applicable.

A primary source of equipment in Belfast Trust would be via the BSO PaLS catalogues. This is a devolved Northern Ireland government agency purchasing equipment on behalf of hospitals and other public bodies (e.g. police, fire, ambulance services, etc.). It would be similar to the NHS Supply Chain in BG. We would not have the information on proportions held centrally. To undertake this exercise would necessitate a manual interrogation of data which would involve a significant number of hours. This would exceed the costs limit specified in the FOI act.

We estimate that compliance with this (element of the) request for information would exceed the appropriate costs limit. Under Section 12 of the Freedom of Information 2000, the limit has been specified as £450 and represents the estimated cost of one or more persons spending 18 hours in determining whether we hold the information, locating, retrieving and extracting this information.

SECTION 3: Waste and Disposal

1. Excess/Expired Equipment: What percentage of your medical equipment inventory was classified as excess, unused, or expired in the last 12 months? Please provide a breakdown by equipment type, if available.

The decisions on those classifications would be undertaken locally for example Wards etc. The Trust would not have this information to hand centrally and I believe it would exceed the 18 hour threshold to try and retrieve this information from local areas.

2. Disposal Responsibility: Is there a specific role or department responsible for overseeing the disposal of medical equipment? If yes, please provide the role(s) and responsibilities.

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- a. **Yes – Individual**
- b. **Yes – Department**
- c. **No**

No- each individual department would be responsible, via their DEC, for arranging disposal of equipment. Depending on the size and nature of the equipment, and the method of disposal (scrapping, trade-in, sale, donation) this might be done directly by them or the equipment passed on to Waste Management or a specialist disposal company. Details in section 7 (*Transfer & Disposal*) of the provided *Belfast Trust Medical Devices Procedures & Guidelines*

3. Formal Disposal Policy: Does your hospital have a formal policy for the disposal of medical equipment?

- a. **Yes (please provide a copy or summary of any policies)**
- b. **No**

No- There is no formal standalone policy but there is extensive guidance in section 7 (*Transfer & Disposal*) of the provided *Belfast Trust Medical Devices Procedures & Guidelines*

4. Types of Commonly Disposed Equipment: Please specify the types of medical equipment most commonly disposed of due to expiry or non-use. Include examples and approximate percentages for each type, if possible.

- a. **Surgical instruments**
- b. **Diagnostic devices**
- c. **Monitoring equipment**
- d. **Imaging equipment**
- e. **Other (please specify)**

The Trust would not routinely dispose of any of the above because of expiry or non-use but the Trust Service Areas might dispose of disposable items (e.g. single-use surgical instruments) or their associated consumables e.g. infusion pump lines. Clinical services might also dispose of items if expired on an ad hoc basis.

NB larger items are not routinely disposed of just because they reach the manufacturer's end-of-life recommendation but rather their continued viability is assessed at time of servicing and takes into account factors such as clinical obsolescence, availability of spares, cost/benefit ratio with regard to increased servicing, etc., etc.

The exact numbers/percentages would not be held centrally and it would exceed the 18 hour FOI threshold to try and retrieve that information.

SECTION 4: Sustainability and Environmental Impact

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1. Sustainability Initiatives: Does your hospital have a sustainability initiative for recycling, reuse, or redistribution of excess or unused medical equipment?

- a. Yes (please provide details)**
- b. No**

No- There is no centralised system for re-use or re-distribution of medical equipment, though there is for office furniture and non-medical equipment. There is some re-use or re-distribution done on an ad hoc basis (with guidance in the *Medical Devices Procedures & Guidelines*).

2. Disposal of Excess or Expired Equipment: How does your hospital manage the disposal of excess, expired, or damaged equipment? Please provide a breakdown by disposal method and indicate the approximate amount (in tonnes) used per year for each method. (Note: this information is for the year 2023)

- a. Recycling**
- b. Donation**
- c. General waste**
- d. Other (please specify)**

All of these categories are used for disposal, and includes sending to auction (#4) but the Trust would not have access to these figures. The exact numbers/percentages would not be held centrally and it would exceed the 18 hour FOI threshold to try and retrieve that information.

SECTION 5: Policies and Compliance

1. Compliance with Disposal Guidelines: How does your hospital ensure compliance with national or NHS guidelines on the disposal and management of medical equipment?

- a. Internal audits**
- b. External audits**
- c. Regular staff training**
- d. Other (please specify)**

In addition to the Medical Devices Procedures & Guidelines, the Trust would check compliance via

- Service Areas undertaking an internal-audit via the Belfast Risk Audit & Assessment Tool (BRAAT) – a suite of Belfast Trust governance audit standards which includes management of medical devices
- external audit – undertaken every few years by BSO (Business Services Organisation) on behalf of the NI Department of Health to assess the Trust Medical Devices management including disposal of equipment.

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- Disposal of equipment is included in the specialist Devices management training provided to all DEC's

2. Internal Audits of Equipment Management: Has your hospital conducted internal audits within the last 12 months to assess the management of excess medical equipment?

- a. Yes (If yes, please indicate the frequency of audits and any key findings, if available)**
- b. No**

No-The Trust advises they would not have conducted any centralised internal audits within the last 12 months to assess the management of excess medical equipment.