

The introduction of specimen transport boxes to reduce plastic waste

December 2018—March 2019

Context

The Blood Sciences department provides a Haematology, Biochemistry, Transfusion and Immunology diagnostic and monitoring service to the clinical directorates throughout the Trust and to a large number of GP practices within the local area, the service is integral to all aspects of the patient pathway as they move through the Trust and beyond into the community setting. The department processes approximately eleven and a half thousand to twelve thousand requests per day and operates on a 24/7 basis, each patient's specimens are currently sent to the laboratory in a separate plastic bag which is then opened manually and individually, the bags are then discarded into a tiger stripe bag producing a large amount of avoidable plastic waste.



The problem

The issue of single use plastic waste has been highlighted globally and disposal of specimen bags from the Reception costs the Trust approximately £5 per day.

The specimen bags used currently do not comply with the United Nations sample transport regulations. Also laboratory staff spend a significant amount of time removing the samples from the bags. The aim of the project was to introduce re-usable specimen transport boxes into GP practice and Phlebotomy services.



What I did

- Stakeholder mapping identified and engage key stakeholders
- Costings were obtained and a budget source secured
- Measurements included:
 - The number of ICE bags supplied to the GP practice per year.
 - An audit of time taken to debug forty bagged samples
 - An audit of Non-infectious healthcare waste bags disposed of by the Blood Sciences Reception each day.
- A box cleaning schedule was devised
- Standard Operating procedures were written
- A satisfaction survey was sent to GP practice and Phlebotomists
- A proposal will be submitted to finance for further funding in August 2019

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The outcome

- Exceeded the planned target of reducing plastic waste to one GP practice by 75%.
- Introduced to Phlebotomy rounds at Freeman

The impact

By introducing reusable transport boxes into one of the largest GP practices and issuing boxes to the phlebotomy team at Freeman a reduction of single use plastic waste has been achieved. A survey of the GP practice staff, phlebotomists and Blood Sciences Reception staff indicate that the boxes have been well received, and except for the need to order some smaller outer transport boxes to use with the Blood Bikes, there have been no issues during the trial.



Next Steps

A meeting has been arranged with the Blood Sciences laboratory Manager to discuss further implementation of the boxes to the biggest GP practices and the rest of the Trust. This will include out-patients when the paper light project is complete and out-patient electronic ordering is introduced. A report will be prepared and submitted to finance demonstrating the potential cost savings of the initiative as well as the environmental benefits.