

Reducing operating theatre bluey use



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Introduction

Disposable absorbent pads (“blueys”) are water, chemical and energy intensive to produce, and take more than 100 years to break down in landfill. They are cheap, readily available, and widely used in healthcare, particularly in operating theatres. However, it would often be appropriate to use a reusable alternative or repurpose another item instead. This study aimed to measure the effect of a range of targeted interventions to reduce bluey use.

Methods

Interventions were implemented in operating theatres at three hospital sites within Western Health, Melbourne in 2021 and 2022.

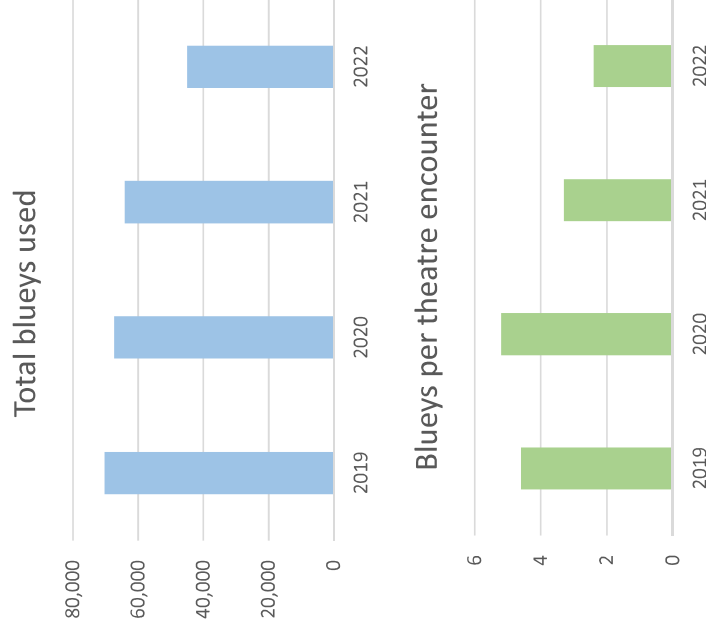
- In 2021: took part in the TRA₂SH “Operation Clean-Up” initiative [1], which included informational posters and an educational presentation to staff
- In 2022:
 - Engaged operating theatre technician and nursing leadership at each site
 - Encouraged anaesthetic trainees to discuss bluey use with their team each day
 - Removed blueys from recovery bedspaces
 - Stocked reusable huck towels as an alternative in anaesthetic rooms, technician storerooms, and recovery bedspaces

Conclusion

Total bluey procurement reduced by 35%, and blueys per theatre encounter by 45%.

This study demonstrates that a substantial reduction in bluey use can be achieved with an awareness and educational campaign, including active engagement of doctors, nurses and technicians, together with replacing blueys at the point of care with suitable alternatives. Ongoing daily conversations with a range of staff were required to achieve observable changes in behaviour, with support from senior leadership of each group at each site appearing to increase the effectiveness of the intervention.

A reusable alternative to blueys could avoid their use and waste altogether, however, a true like-for-like alternative does not currently exist. Western Health has engaged their linen supplier to develop one, though this is an ongoing process.



Acknowledgements

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Declaration of interests

All authors are members of Doctors for the Environment Australia.

References

TRA₂SH. Operation Clean Up. From: <https://www.tra2sh.org/ocu>. Accessed 11 January 2022.