

# Reusable Bags

## A sustainable initiative for the transport and delivery of medications

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### Background

The healthcare industry has a large carbon footprint and is the second biggest contributor to landfill worldwide<sup>1</sup>. At Prince of Wales Hospital, all individually dispensed (non-impres) and accountable medications (Schedule 8 and 4D) are delivered in single-use paper bags which are placed into general waste bins upon delivery. In 4 months we order over 1500 single-use paper bags, 80% of these are used to deliver medications.

### Description

The proposed practice change involves replacing paper with reusable bags as a sustainable, confidential and secure method for the transport and delivery of all individually dispensed and accountable medication from the pharmacy department. This initiative aligns with the Environmental Protection Authority's highest priority – to avoid and reduce waste<sup>2</sup>.

### Results/Evaluation

After initial pilot in April 2019, evaluation of the reusable bags for delivery of accountable and individually dispensed medications was undertaken. A survey (using Quality Audit Reporting System (QARS)) was distributed for feedback.

- 24 respondents;
  - 11 RN's
  - 13 pharmacy staff (pharmacists, technicians and porters)

As a result of the survey data an instruction sheet was created and attached to each reusable bag for accountable medications to aid the RN's in the use of the bag.

Did you find the reusable bags for S8 and S4D medications?

Bag Characteristics	Yes	No	N/A
Robust, No. (%)	20 (87)	0 (0)	3 (13)
Good size, No. (%)	19 (82.6)	1 (4.3)	3 (13)
Ward clearly displayed, No. (%)	19 (82.6)	1 (4.3)	3 (13)
Security tag easy to break, No. (%)	10 (43.5)	2 (8.7)	11 (47.8)
If bag contained fridge item, No. (%)	4 (17.4)	0 (0)	19 (82.6)

### Implications and Conclusions

The introduction of reusable bags will have many positive outcomes for the pharmacy department and Prince of Wales Hospital, including;

#### Financial

- 80% reduction in expenditure equating to an approximate saving of \$260 per annum

#### Environmental

- Waste reduction in pharmacy department and hospital

#### Safety

- Safe and efficient transport of medications

### Where to next?

- Hospital wide roll out of reusable bags for individually dispensed (non-impres) medications
- Ongoing evaluation

#### References

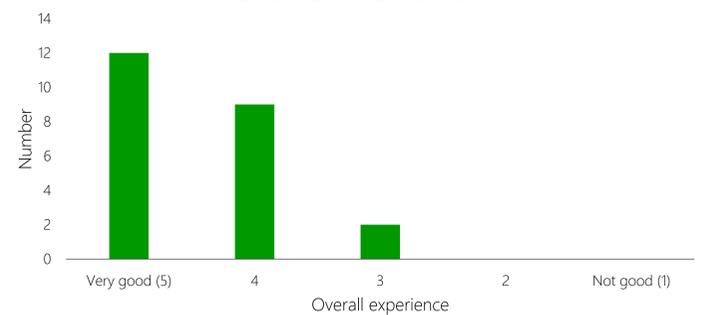
- Wong G. Environmental sustainability. How is it relevant to my patients...and me? [editorial]. Pharmacy GRIT 2019; 3: 8-9.
- NSW Environment Protection Authority. The Waste Hierarchy, 2017 Available from < <https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/your-environment/recycling-and-reuse/warr-strategy/the-waste-hierarchy>>

### Actions

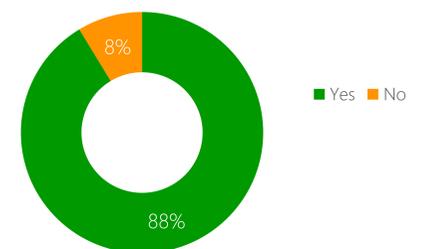
In April 2019, a pilot was conducted over a 4 week period where reusable bags were used for transporting and delivering all medications (accountable and non-impres) to one ward. The procedure for the use of reusable bags was developed prior and tested during this pilot period. The pilot was evaluated and reusable bag transport of accountable medications has been implemented across Prince of Wales Hospital.



88% (21/24) had a good experience (4-5 rating) and wanted to continue to use the bags for transporting accountable medications



Do you think reusable bags are a safer option for transporting accountable medications to wards?



#### Feedback quotes from QARS survey

- "Much more secure and tamper-proof than the paper bags currently used"
- "I think it's (reusable bags) great as it saves on using the paper bags"
- "It's great to see less waste"
- "Stronger than paper bags, more secure and environmentally friendly"
- "More secure rather than using paper bags that rip, also paper bags don't fit all medications, sometimes it is quite full. Also more sustainable for the environment."

#### Acknowledgements & Contact Details

Special mention to Declan Gibney (Deputy Director of Pharmacy – Business Support) and Samantha Ryan (7E NUM) and her team. Thanks to the Prince of Wales Pharmacy team.

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Health  
South Eastern Sydney  
Local Health District

April 2018  
Renew and amend impres lists for accountable medications

May 2018 – Dec 2018  
Trial updated impres lists and encourage good ordering habits

April 2019  
Reusable bag pilot on one ward (P7E) for all medications

May 2019  
Evaluate pilot – feedback from RN's, pharmacy staff and porters

June 2019  
Funding approved from executive to purchase reusable bags

July 2019 – August 2019  
Nursing engagement – meetings with NUM's and CNC's

September 2019  
Reusable bag instruction sheet created based on feedback from pilot

October 2019  
Hospital wide rollout of reusable bags for accountable medications

December 2019  
Hospital wide implementation of reusable bags for ALL medications