

Progress in Practice

Isle of Man Real Nappy Campaign

Midwife pioneers reusable nappies in NHS maternity units to reduce clinical waste and raise public awareness of the product. Isle of Man government interest-free loans ensure that even the poorest families can afford this more sustainable option.

Summary

The Isle of Man Real Nappy Campaign aims to reduce poverty and social exclusion, create local employment opportunities and promote environmental best practice in NHS maternity clinics.

Midwife Mary O'Connor initiated the campaign in March 2003. She was concerned by the lack of availability of reusable nappies on the Isle of Man and the high initial cost of these products (twenty nappies are upwards of £150) for families on low incomes. Reusable nappies can be more cost effective than disposables in the long-term and can, therefore, save young families money whilst reducing the load for landfill.

Mary presented this case to the Isle of Man government. This resulted in the introduction of interest-free loans for reusable nappies for families on income support benefits in April 2004. This was extended to recipients of family credit in September 2004. Public awareness and use of these nappies has risen considerably as a result.

(Continued overleaf)



"The project breaks a cycle of deprivation. Aiding parents with the initial outlay for reusable nappies saves them money over time which can be spent on healthier food, thereby improving the quality of life of the family unit"
Mary O'Connor, Midwife, Noble's Hospital

Links and organisations involved: Isle of Man Government, Department of Health and Social Security (www.gov.im/dhss), NHS Estates Building Better Healthcare Awards (www.nhsestates.gov.uk), The Green Organisation (www.thegreenorganisation.info), British Journal of Midwifery (www.markallengroup.com/healthcare/bjm), British Standard Institute (www.bsi-global.com), Health Protection Agency (www.hpa.org.uk), Infection Control Nurses Association (www.icna.co.uk) and Society of Hospital Linen Service and Laundry Managers (www.linenmanager.co.uk)

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(Summary continued...)

In addition Mary successfully campaigned within Noble's Hospital to introduce reusable nappies. After two years of product development, the Stork-eco nappy was introduced in September 2005. This NHS product is produced in the UK, creating employment opportunities, it is non-profit making and its outer wrap is stylishly crafted from hospital mattress covers!

As a result of the campaign disposable nappy waste in the hospital has been reduced by 99.9% which represents a total reduction of clinical waste by 83%. This has environmental benefits and saves the NHS money which is reinvested into healthcare. Importantly it sets a good example to young parents.

In 2004 Mary won three awards for this pioneering campaign (through NHS Estates, the British Journal of Midwifery and the Green Organisation) and she has recently extended the scheme to the Shetland Islands, Orkney Islands, Cornwall and West Sussex.

A Challenge Overcome

Laundry costs at Noble's Hospital were originally calculated in terms of the number of items laundered at a fixed cost per item. The same cost was allocated to launder a sheet as a nappy, even though a nappy is considerably smaller.

Mary argued that laundry costs should be calculated on the basis of weight. In this case one sheet (weighing 1200g) would be equivalent to 17 nappies (weighing 70g each). Using this method of calculation the Stork-eco nappy became a financially viable option.

Strategic Learning

- Innovative ideas can become a reality with strong leadership and stakeholder involvement
- Small projects can become flagships for new practices in the NHS



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