

Implementing a Walking Aid Reuse and Recycling Scheme at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust

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Background/context

- Walking aids are in the top 20 of medical devices and equipment for their embedded carbon footprint
- A refurbished walking aid is on average 87% lower in carbon emissions than a new walking aid
- National target of 40% of walking aids to be reused by 2025
- Patients and staff often hold incorrect and outdated views that these are single-use items
- Walking aids can be safely reused repeatedly providing they are returned
- Increasing concerns from staff around supply chain issues
- Historic rules and perceptions around the ability to return walking aids, resulting in stock remaining in patients' homes when no longer required

Objective

To reduce our carbon emissions associated with walking aids by implementing a reuse and recycling scheme at Imperial College Healthcare Trust by December 2023.

Measurement

Increase in:

- Number of walking aids returned
- Number of refurbished walking aids being issued to patients

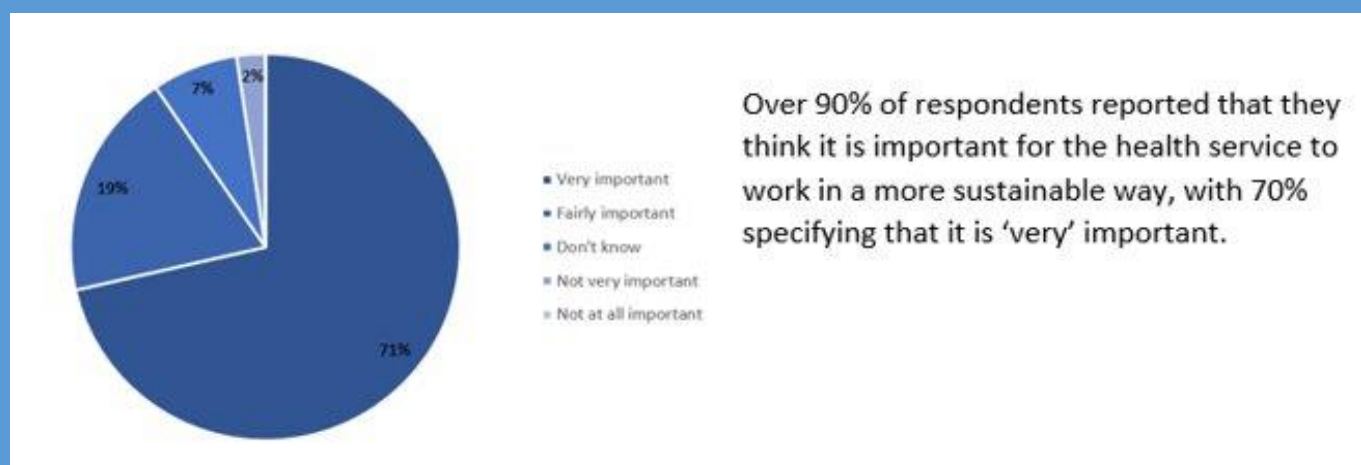
Decrease in:

- Number of brand new walking aids being issued
- Carbon emissions associated with walking aids

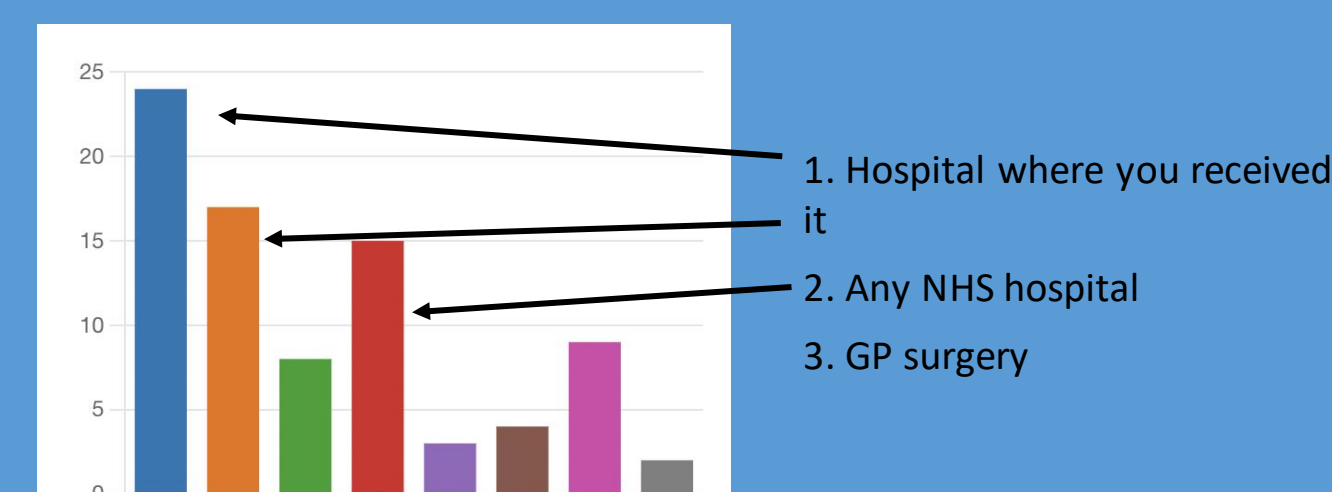


Patient engagement

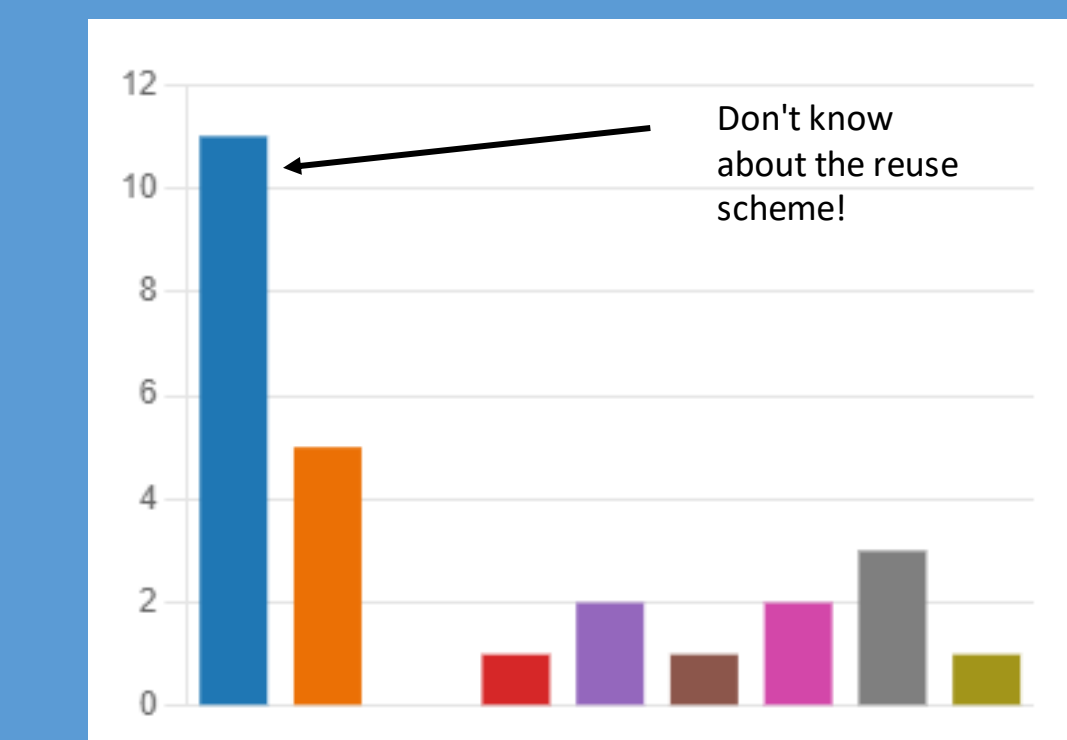
- We surveyed 42 patients to gain their views about sustainability in general, as well as in a healthcare setting. We used these insights to co-design a return and reuse service that is fit for purpose and caters to our patients' needs



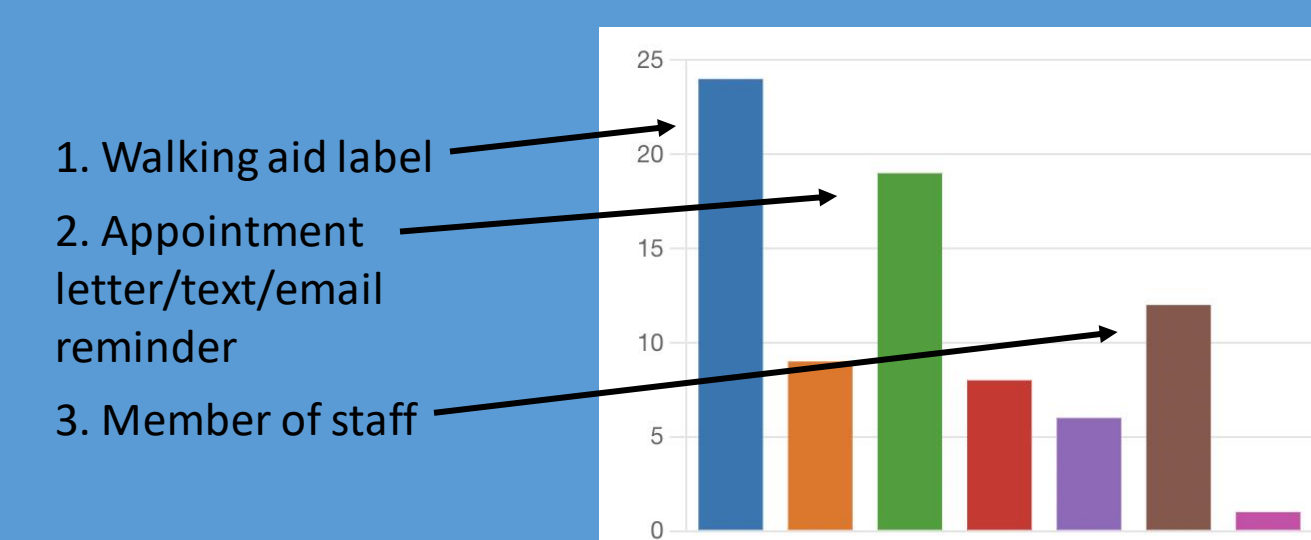
Where would be the easiest for you to return the walking aid?



Why are you unlikely to return the walking aid?



What is the best way to let you know where to return the walking aid?



What we did

Infrastructure

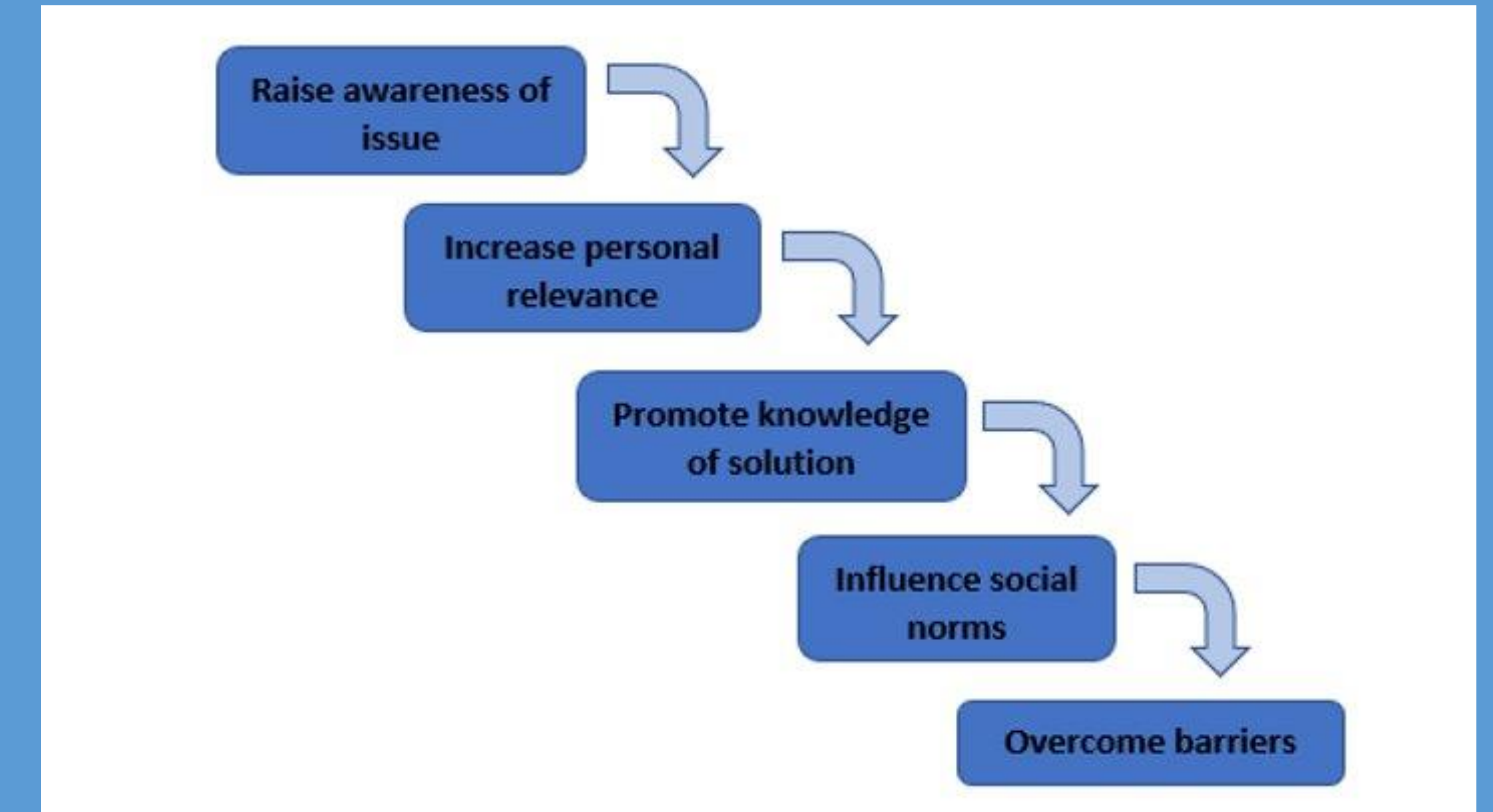
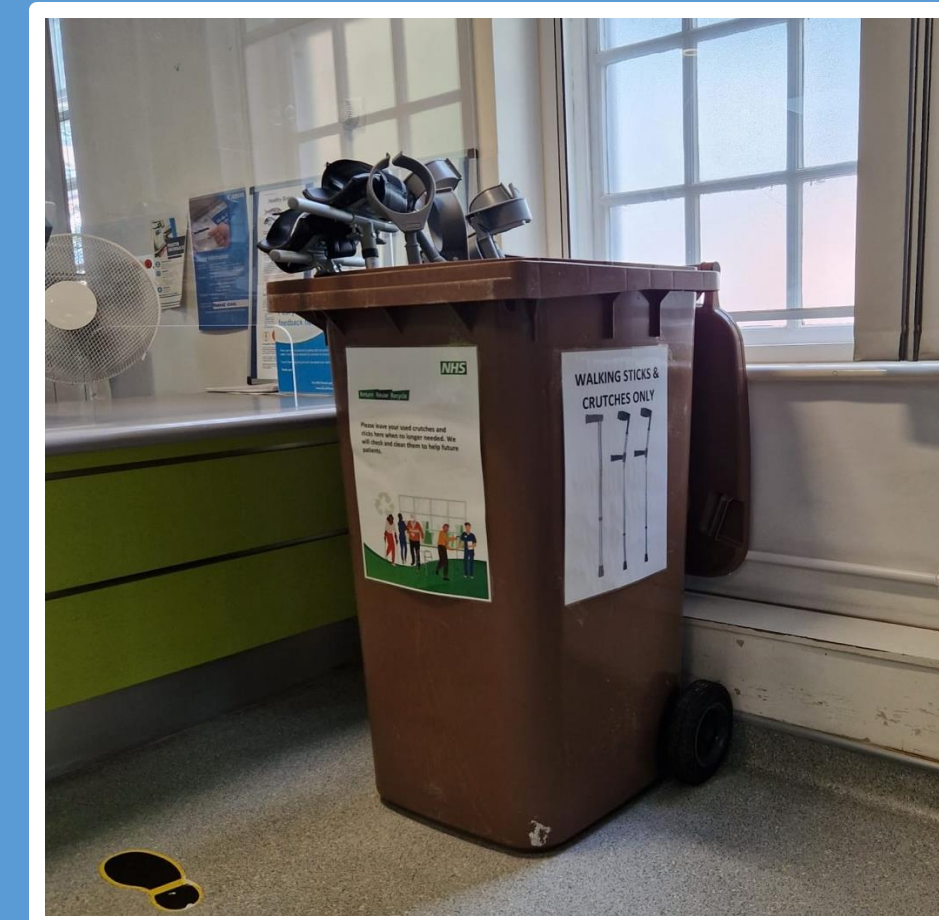
- Increase the number of returns locations within the hospital:
 - Liaison with fracture clinic lead nurse, OP lead nurse, waste manager, porters
 - Create new pathways and processes with these key stakeholders
 - Create clear signage to advertise the new bins
 - Commence recording of returned walking aids
 - Create SOP for assistants to follow
 - Create and maintain returns log

Patient information

- Auto-text on discharge summaries
- Added returns info to pre-operative information
- Promotion via Trust social media

Staff engagement

- Front of house
- Presenting to relevant teams

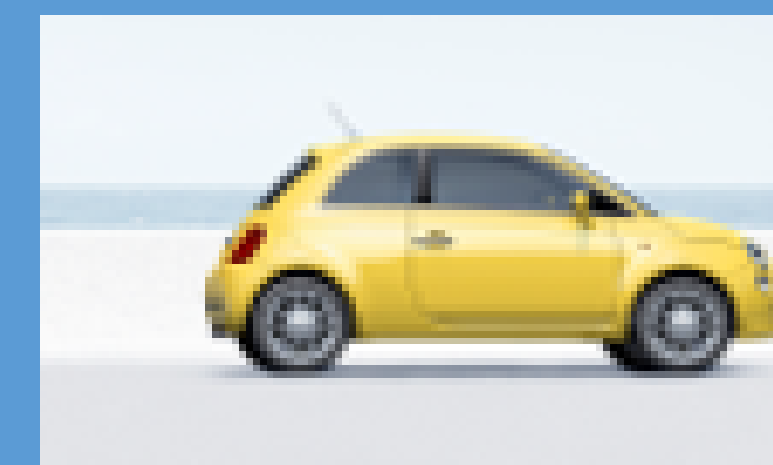


Outcomes

- Routine recording of stock orders and returns:
- July = 22 pairs reused, 60 new ordered: 36% against national target of 40%
- Reusing 1 pair e/c's saves 19kg CO2e... 22 re-used pairs in July = 418kg CO2e = 1807 miles in average UK petrol car!

Collection Date	EC (Pairs)	Disposed of/ Recycled	Re-issuable	XL-EC	Disposed of /Recycled	Re- issuable
06/07/2023	2	0	2	0	0	0
13/07/2023	12	0	12	0	0	0
20/07/2023	5	1	4	1	0	1
28/07/2023	3	0	3	0	0	0

Order Date	EC	XL-EC
11/07/2023	40	0
31/07/2023	20	0



Challenges



Conducting the primary research took longer than expected. We therefore allocated more resource towards data collection and maintained close contact with key stakeholders



Regular contamination of 24-access bin with general waste. Improved signage with larger images and placed a domestic waste bin in close proximity to walking aid collection receptacle



Obtaining baseline data Developed good working relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Identified and consolidated information from a variety of sources

Next steps

- Barcoding – collaborating with external partners to pilot a barcode scanning system to enable better tracking of walking aids linked to digital patient records
- Auditing the new process regularly until business as usual
- Patient feedback and engagement
- Secured funding to support scheme infrastructure and roll-out across all hospital sites
- Increasing advertising on social media

Acknowledgements

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