

Barriers and Facilitators for Advancing Environmental Sustainability in Surgical Practice

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Background

Surgery is a major contributor to environmental damage within healthcare. This study explored key informants’ perceptions of barriers and facilitators to advancing sustainability in surgical practice.

Methodology

- Qualitative study
- Semi-structured interviews with 18 surgical professionals at SAGES 2024
- Participants must have watched the half-day devoted to sustainability in surgery
- Purposive sampling recruited surgeons, fellows, and residents attending the sustainability lecture series
 - Interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed using the framework method

Results

Participants acknowledged habitual resource waste in surgery and emphasized the need to integrate sustainability discussions into routine surgical practice.

Sustainable Practices

Personal sustainable practices varied, with some surgeons finding it **easier** than others to adopt eco-friendly behaviors **outside their professional setting**.

"I do wonder sometimes whether using reusable gowns and drapes is as environmentally friendly as it might be considered...it does use a lot of water and detergent"

"Outside of the hospital, I think it is a lot easier...you can make decisions for yourself"

Barriers

Key barriers included **perceived cost, institutional constraints, and time limitations**. Informants reported **resistance to change** and **declining motivation** for sustainability efforts after returning to regular routines at work.

"If you introduce anything new, there is always a problem"

"Time is probably the biggest barrier"

"Show the cost savings...we could benefit from strong leadership"

Facilitators

Facilitators included **ongoing dialogue, education, strategic leadership, and institutional support**; many endorsing **incremental changes** as a pathway to systemic change. Some noted the role of institutional **green teams in advocating change** and maintaining momentum.

"It's never an all or nothing answer"

"I believe education in general...speaking is the right way to fix problems"

Recommendations

Participants recommended demonstrating **financial and scientific benefits** of sustainable practices to **stakeholders**, and incorporating **sustainability education into medical and residency education**.

"Updating surgeon preference cards"

"Big data...a gap I think needs to be bridged"

"We need to push the industry more to focus on reusables instead of recycling"