

## National Green Theatres Programme

### Caps Off to Sustainability: NHS Borders' Shift to Reusable Surgical Caps February 2025



**Rebecca Lovett**  
CDF Anaesthetics  
Borders General Hospital

#### About

At present, theatres across Scotland are predominately utilising single use, plastic based disposable scrub caps. Locally, our figures indicate that the annual burden is £2430.41, equating to 28,000 hats.

#### Background

With the Scottish Government's impending targets; to reduce landfill waste to <5% and recycle 70% of all waste by 2025, measures must be taken to reduce the burden of waste.

#### Proposed Change

One small, but simple measure to reduce our environmental impact and our financial footprint, would be to introduce washable scrub caps nationally.

The idea is welcomed by the staff within Borders General Hospital (BGH), including our Laundry Facilities Manager, most of whom are environmentally conscientious and wish to make more sustainable choices where possible.

5 suppliers were approached to assess quality, suitability for hospital laundering, sizes and styles available, and cost. Samples were requested, with 4 suppliers providing samples for test laundering.

#### Challenges

Staff engagement was mixed at the beginning, with some resistance by staff due to preference for the disposable option, hygiene concerns with shared pool of hats, colour preference and lack of identity (though we didn't preclude people from wearing their own).

Finally, there was a slow uptake once launched but as with change, there is a period of adjustment as new habits are formed.

Roll-out to other departments is the next phase for reusable surgical caps, with potential to include other relevant departments such as labour suite, dental and day case theatres. We understand that this could prove challenging with each respective department having their own budget and the logistics of sorting various colours of hats across different clinical areas.

These challenges can be mitigated by taking a collaborative approach will be essential. Engaging staff early through education on the environmental and financial benefits, addressing hygiene concerns with clear protocols for laundering, and offering a wider range of colours or personalised options can help improve acceptance. For wider implementation, working closely with department leads to coordinate budgets and streamline logistics will ensure a smoother transition and sustained uptake across clinical areas.

#### Outcome / Results

Of the samples obtained, one company demonstrated good quality, pure cotton scrub hats, available in two styles, four sizes and a range of colours. These hats were felt to be most suited to staff compared to the alternatives and they laundered within hospital facilities well.

The lifespan of the hats is on average three years with the option of returning to the supplier for recycling, at a fee.

Furthermore, they offer a 25% bulk order discount on orders over 250 units, with VAT exemption, and if processed through National Procurement, a significant reduction in cost can potentially be achieved.

## Learning

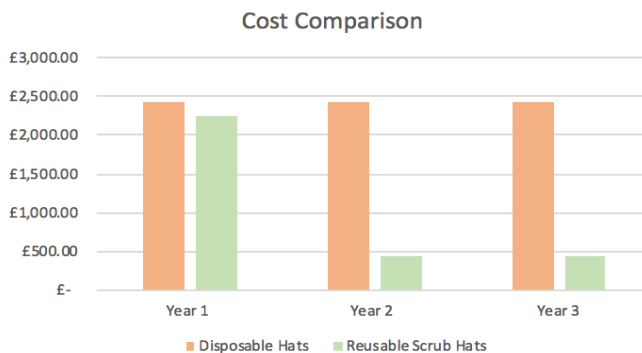
With an estimated 75 hats used per day within our theatre suite and a turnaround time of up to three days for our laundry facilities, we propose that a 5-day supply would be sufficient for our initial order, with potential for requiring replacements of up to 20% in years 2 and 3.



Proposed reusable scrub hats

## Further Information

1. Estimated savings over a three-year period.



2. [NHSScotland Waste Prevention and Re-use Guide, J Tremlow, The Scottish Government](#)