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(Accepted for publication March 13, 2017.)

Promoting Sustainable Practices *via* Art

To the Editor:

A few plastic caps from medication vials used for an individual anesthetic may seem insignificant; however, these items accumulate. Using five vials per case for 30,000 cases annually, we waste 150,000 caps per year. At the University of Wisconsin–Madison, we identified an opportunity to divert this commonly discarded material from landfills. Although too small for comingled recycling, caps can be recycled successfully when collected separately. Recycling rates of 20 to 25% are achievable in the operating room without compromising infection control or creating financial constraints.¹

Forming a multidisciplinary green team is an effective means for promoting sustainable practices.^{2,3} To raise

provider awareness of the amount of waste that can be generated in a healthcare setting, our green team initiated a vial cap collection (fig. 1). In addition to recycling caps, we collaborated with our hospital art coordinator to create mosaic artwork from this colorful material (fig. 2). Interest in the art project was greater than anticipated, creating dialogue between staff in all areas of the hospital. Staff have joined together for several art-making events in which participants sort the caps by color and participate in gluing the caps to a large art piece. Educational information about green efforts in the healthcare setting was on display for participants to learn more. Seeing the large collection of small plastics conveys the impact of medical waste. Holding these plastics in their hands to create artwork inspires healthcare providers to look at the bigger picture of the environmental impact of our practice.

Research Support

Support was provided solely from institutional and/or departmental sources.

Competing Interests

Dr. Zuegge receives nonclinical time for her role as Medical Director of Sustainability for University of Wisconsin Health. The Department of Planning, Design, and Construction funded the printing, materials, and supplies for, and framing of, the artwork. The other authors declare no competing interests.

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Fig. 2. One of the completed artworks now on display in our hospital.



Fig. 1. Hospital staff participate in a vial cap sorting event.

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(Accepted for publication March 31, 2017.)