Reducing Red Bag Misuse

What constitutes regulated medical waste (RMW) is defined nationally by OSHA and its disposal is regulated at the state level.

RMW disposal is often associated with higher financial costs. At Brigham and Women’s Hospital, RMW disposal costs 5-times as much as regular waste disposal.

RMW disposal also has harmful environmental side effects. Many of the methods for treating and disposing of RMW have high energy requirements or are environmentally polluting.

**CHALLENGES**

1. Lack of clinical staff education on waste segregation (e.g., environmental and financial impacts)
2. Time pressure on throughput for clinical care
3. Infection control safety protocols

**SOLUTIONS**

1. **Connect with local clinical champions**
   - Recruiting clinical champions to lead education efforts is likely to improve effectiveness of such efforts

2. **Design waste streams to best align with clinical workflow**
   - Improving access to appropriate waste receptacles where needed will improve compliance to OSHA standards

3. **Research state, city, and hospital infection control / waste disposal policies prior to project implementation**
   - Include infection control colleagues in project design and implementation to assure compliance and buy-in

**BENEFITS**

- Reduce carbon emissions from transport of waste to processing facilities and emissions/harmful byproducts of RMW processing
- Potentially for simultaneous improvement of recycling efforts

**COST SAVINGS**

- Upfront costs may increase due to:
  - Increased hospital management costs
  - Initial purchasing of new waste receptacles
- However reducing inappropriate overuse of RMW and switching to normal waste stream will reduce costs in the medium- to long-term by upwards of $200,000