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Implementing In-Room Recycling on a Family Medical Center

Ariann Schultz, BSN, BS, RNC-OB & Sarah E. Johnson, BSN, BA, RN-BC

Background

- Healthcare generates an estimated 29lbs of waste per patient per day.
- Healthcare contributes nearly 8.5% of Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the United States worsening the climate crisis.
- Proper recycling can reduce carbon emissions and behaviors increase when recycling bins are near trash receptacles.
- Recycling contaminated materials worsens carbon emissions; all impacted materials go to the landfill.
- Hospital-based nurses report barriers to proper recycling, yet a desire to reduce waste.

Purpose

- To test whether recycling education and increased availability of recycling bins increases nursing understanding and rates of recycling and decreases contamination rates.

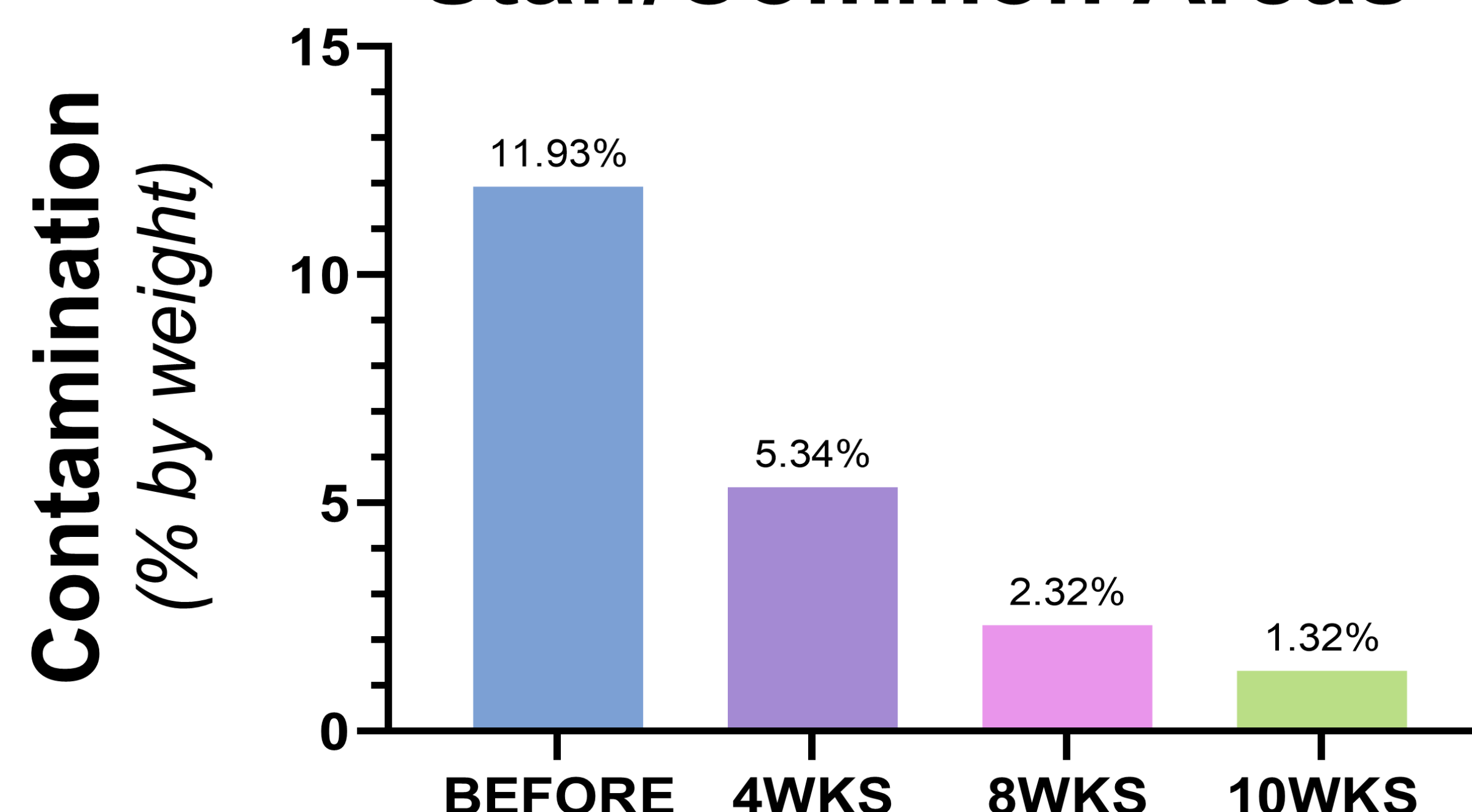
Methods

- Recycling bins and educational signage placed in patient rooms
- Staff education on proper recycling techniques provided; pre and post surveys on recycling knowledge and actions.
- Four objective assessments of recycling weight and contamination rates completed.



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Staff/Common Areas



Results

- Contamination rates decreased from 11.94% to 1.32%; See figure below.
- A one tailed t-test showed increased rates and understanding of recycling after the trial period.
- 0.5-1 lbs was recycled daily compared to negligible prior.



Discussion

- Ongoing education increased recycling rates and decreased contamination on our unit.
- Improving availability of recycling bins promoted an increase in proper recycling behaviors among nurses and patients on our unit.

Implications for Practice

- In-room recycling bins can increase hospital recycling rates and decrease contamination.
- Spreading this practice to all units across all hospitals, coupled with staff and patient education, could significantly lower carbon emissions.

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