



**Women's  
Environmental  
Network**

NAPPIES AND THE NHS

WASTE PREVENTION

AND

A FAIR CHOICE FOR PARENTS

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WASTE PREVENTION AND A FAIR CHOICE FOR PARENTS**

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with thanks to Teresa Ridge and Liz Sutton

Women's Environmental Network  
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## INTRODUCTION

### A SMALL CHANGE IN POLICY COULD EFFECT A BIG CHANGE IN PRACTICE

Simply by making fair information available to UK parents, the NHS can make a large impact on the effectiveness of the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs' (DEFRA)'s Waste Implementation Programme (WIP).

The government's waste minimisation strategy as set out in the WIP, May 2003 targets real nappies and home composting to lead waste prevention in the UK. But the NHS is not helping. As things stand in the majority of hospitals and NHS trusts throughout the UK, disposable nappies are demonstrated in parentcraft and ante-natal classes, are promoted or offered free in Bounty Packs and are the only nappies in use on the maternity and paediatric wards. The NHS is thus effectively promoting disposable nappies.

As an essential source of information and guidance to new parents, the NHS plays a highly influential role in parental behaviour and consumer choices. Informed choice is encouraged in many aspects of health care and this approach should also be promoted where NHS practice affects consumer behaviour, especially when this has waste implications which are being addressed by another government department.

By ensuring that parents are informed of the nappy choices available to them and gradually adopting cloth nappies as the norm, the NHS can influence a shift towards real nappy use. This will enable a reduction in waste growth, provide cost savings to the NHS and benefit families by promoting cheaper alternatives to disposables.

The NHS is in contact with all new parents and nappy users and therefore is an obvious conduit of information to this user group. In households with babies,

nappies make up a significant proportion of the weekly bin, so switching to cloth nappies enables families to make a large, obvious cut in their household waste.

The NHS profits from the distribution of Bounty packs, which promote disposable nappies and baby wipes to new mothers, but the use of disposable nappies in maternity units is costing the NHS an estimated 88p per baby in clinical waste charges - roughly equivalent to profits from Bounty. Contractual arrangements for the distribution of Bounty bags vary from hospital to hospital, and exclusivity arrangements restrict the promotion of other products. For example, Nature's Gift, an alternative promotional pack developed by the Cornish Real Nappy Project with the support of the County Council and the local healthcare trust is not allowed to be distributed in the hospitals due to contractual arrangements with Bounty. Thus the incentivised freebie pack system is working against the provision of fair information to parents in the NHS.

Disposable nappies are perceived as the norm. Developed in the 1950s-1960s disposable nappies took over majority use in the 1980s. Now, with an annual adspend of over £10 million, the disposable nappy industry has a firm hold on the market. Market saturation, advertising and peer influence have a greater impact on parents' choice of nappies than health professionals.<sup>1</sup> For a genuine fair choice, information available from health professionals must be improved.

Recent research by the University of Surrey<sup>2</sup> concluded that "a change in maternity unit policy from one in which all parents supply their own disposable nappies to that of supplying parents with cotton nappies during their post-natal

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<sup>1</sup> The Implementation and Evaluation of Cotton Nappy Provision at East Surrey Hospital Maternity Unit, David Uzzell and Rachel Leach, University of Surrey, September 2003

<sup>2</sup> The Implementation and Evaluation of Cotton Nappy Provision at East Surrey Hospital Maternity Unit, David Uzzell and Rachel Leach, University of Surrey, September 2003

stay would impact on the parents' attitudes and waste minimisation behaviour.”

Despite the absence of NHS policy, there are some good examples for implementing real nappy education and use in NHS hospitals. WEN knows of 23 hospitals around the UK which are currently using cloth nappies on the maternity ward with another to start in April - approximately 7% of UK maternity units.

### **Summary conclusions and recommendations**

#### **Conclusions:**

- The NHS is not providing parents across the UK with equal access to fair and impartial information about the full range of choices available to them.
- In most hospitals, disposable nappies are being promoted by default, through their use on ward, in demonstrations and information given to parents, and free hand-outs with Bounty bags for new parents.
- This situation and the Department of Health's failure to date to intervene undermines the Government's waste strategy.
- Despite the absence of NHS policy, there are many good examples for implementing real nappy education and use in NHS hospitals: at least 23 hospitals around the UK are using cloth nappies on maternity wards.
- Where parents are given a fair choice, nappy waste is reduced and parents, health services and local councils all make savings.

#### **WEN recommends that:**

- The Department of Health acts to support the Government's waste strategy by encouraging fair provision of real nappy information and education and adopting a real nappy policy.
- Local health services follow the example of successful real nappy schemes across the UK and adopt voluntary policies.

Full conclusions and recommendations are at the end of this report.

## NAPPY WASTE

Disposable nappies are wasteful, single use items. There is a simple, practical, waste preventing alternative in the many varieties of modern cloth nappies which may be washed at home or by a nappy laundry service.

In the UK, nappies are responsible for up to 4% of household waste<sup>3</sup>, costing the council taxpayer tens of millions of pounds in disposal costs. Individual local authorities spend hundreds of thousands of pounds every year dealing with nappy waste. For example, Bristol City spends £500,000 a year on nappy disposal while Essex and Nottinghamshire Councils estimate that dealing with nappy waste costs them a million pounds a year. These costs can be lowered with increased real nappy use.

Landfill space is running out. 90% of nearly 3 billion<sup>4</sup> nappies thrown away in the UK every year end up in landfill where they generate methane gas, a potent contributor to global warming. Incineration is not a trouble free solution with the associated pollutants in air emissions and residual ash. If we continue at current growth rates, the amount of household waste going to landfill will have doubled by 2020. At the same time the European Landfill Directive requires us to reduce the amount of biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill to 35% of the 1995 total by 2020 and that includes nappies.

DEFRA recognises the urgent need to reduce the growth in the waste stream and has set out its plans in the Waste Implementation Programme (WIP), May 2003. The Government has selected the promotion of home composting and real nappies to lead waste prevention in the UK. Nappies have an easily identified user group with which the NHS is in regular contact. DEFRA needs the support of the Department of Health in communicating effectively with this user group in order to meet the stringent waste reduction targets of the EU Landfill Directive.

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<sup>3</sup> Defra

<sup>4</sup> Disposable Nappies and Baby Wipes, Market Intelligence, April 2002

## BENEFITS TO PARENTS

Real nappies are increasingly popular among parents. WEN estimates real nappy use to be around 15%. This is supported by recent results of a Western Riverside Environment Fund survey which found market penetration of real nappies to be 14% and by the results of a survey at Surrey General Maternity Hospital<sup>5</sup> where 15% of parents interviewed in hospital intended to use cloth nappies.

Parents could save up to £500 by washing nappies at home. Even more could be saved when re-using nappies on a second or third child. Second hand nappies are available through websites and WEN's 2<sup>nd</sup> Hand Exchange. With nearly a third of all UK children living below the poverty line,<sup>6</sup> this cost saving is crucial. Recognising the benefits they offer to disadvantaged parents, Sure Start are promoting real nappies in a number of areas around the UK while some local authorities are operating promotional schemes for real nappies in disadvantaged areas. (see Appendix 1)

Even service laundered nappies can save money. A number of local authorities<sup>7</sup> are developing subsidised laundry services in disadvantaged areas to enable parents to avoid the unnecessary cost burden of disposable nappies. The local jobs provided in the laundry are an additional benefit to the local economy.

Disposable nappies are made of paper pulp, plastics and superabsorbent chemicals. Real nappies are mostly made of natural fabrics giving parents the option to choose a natural product for their babies. For the best option, organic cotton and hemp nappies and organic wool overpants are available at reasonable cost.

There are many misconceptions surrounding both real and disposable nappies. In a recent survey parents were surprised to discover that disposable nappies were not biodegradable.<sup>8</sup> There is still a popular belief that folded and pinned terry nappies are

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<sup>5</sup> The Implementation and Evaluation of Cotton Nappy Provision at East Surrey Hospital Maternity Unit, David Uzzell and Rachel Leach, University of Surrey, September 2003

<sup>6</sup> Child Poverty Action Network

<sup>7</sup> St Helen's District Council has introduced a subsidised service. Subsidised laundry service is available in Belfast. Similar schemes are being investigated in Birmingham and Camden.

<sup>8</sup> The Implementation and Evaluation of Cotton Nappy Provision at East Surrey Hospital Maternity Unit, David Uzzell and Rachel Leach, University of Surrey, September 2003

the only alternative to disposables and that washing them is an onerous task. Even Department of Health baby care publications make only passing mention of laundry services and modern cloth nappies. In fact there is a wide variety of modern shaped, self-fastening real nappies and breathable waterproof wraps. With almost universal access to washing machines, home laundry of nappies is straightforward.

There is evidence to suggest that, given a chance to try them out, parents find cloth nappies easier to use than they thought. The Surrey survey found that having experienced cotton nappies on the hospital ward, parents were more positive about their ability to use and wash cotton nappies.

## **BENEFITS TO THE NHS**

Disposable nappies contribute to the high clinical waste disposal costs of maternity units. Clinical waste volumes produced in hospitals vary according to care group and maternity hospitals are the second largest producers of clinical waste with an average of 0.71 tonnes per bed, per year<sup>9</sup>.

By using cloth nappies on-ward, maternity units can remove substantial volumes of disposable nappy waste and reduce clinical waste disposal charges.

The amount of waste arising from the use of disposable nappies within maternity units is not known but it has been suggested that between 10% and 15% of clinical waste from the units is made up of disposable nappies. Therefore for every 100 maternity beds, between 7 and 10 tonnes of waste per year is estimated to be attributable to disposable nappies

The local cost of disposing of clinical waste varies widely between Trusts. Costs range from £266 to £550<sup>10</sup>. If a midrange is taken as £400, then for every 100 maternity beds the clinical waste cost for disposable nappies ranges between £2,840 and £4,260. With 596,000 live births and an estimated total of 12,252 maternity beds in 2002

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<sup>9</sup> NHS Scotland Property and Environment Forum, 2001-2002

<sup>10</sup> Clinical waste costs vary with charges ranging from £266 per tonne in Bassetlaw to £550 per tonne in West Sussex with a mid-range of approximately £400.

nappy disposal costs work out at between 58p and 88p per baby plus portering and service charges.

In addition, where the NHS supplies free disposable nappies, further savings can be made. In the year 2002-2003 the NHS bought 12 million disposable nappies at a cost of £1.5 million.<sup>11</sup> A reduction could be made through the substitution of cloth nappies.

Reductions can be achieved in the amount of clinical waste to be disposed of in several ways. An Audit Commission Report (1997) recommended that careful segregation of waste would reduce the amount of domestic waste placed in clinical waste bags in error, for example magazines, newspapers and flowers. A second approach is to review the classification of waste. Sanpro waste, such as nappies, can be suitable for direct disposal to landfill if a risk assessment has been carried out to show that there is no infection risk (Environment Agency, 2003). Waste segregation can facilitate recycling and enable the amount of clinical waste to be reduced saving the Trusts money. However, these methods do not reduce the waste volumes. They may cut costs but they don't improve the environmental performance or prevent waste which is the first priority.

Using cloth nappies on maternity wards will save money by reducing the amount of waste produced. Although setting up such schemes will incur initial start up costs, funding may be available from the local authority. Alternatively start up can be funded from projected savings from avoiding disposal costs. Having accounted for the costs of implementing the on-ward laundry service, The Recycling Consortium calculated the combined clinical waste costs at the Princess Anne Wing, Royal United Hospital, Bath and Paulton Hospital, Bristol as £3,200 per annum for the two units.<sup>12</sup>

However, waste disposal in the Trusts is dealt with centrally and individual wards are not currently credited with the cost savings they make. This provides little motivation for busy staff to allocate time to investigating ways to minimise waste. For the effective implementation of on-ward cloth nappy use, the clinical waste cost savings should be credited to the maternity ward.

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<sup>11</sup> Parliamentary Question 154772

<sup>12</sup> Appendix 2 Real Nappy Pilot Scheme at Princess Anne Wing, RUH, Bath and Paulton Hospital, January 2002, Mo McManus, Recycling Consortium

A waste audit conducted for St Michael's Hospital, Bristol, June 2001 concluded that the use of real nappies could save the hospital £2,500 a year in clinical waste costs plus ancillary savings in cleaning and portering. The hospital has approximately 4,400 births per year.

Other cases have predicted higher potential clinical waste cost savings which may be partly attributable to variations in clinical waste charges. For example, it has been estimated that the implementation of cloth nappies on ward at St Mary's Hospital, Portsmouth would initially cost £8,000 but could save Portsmouth hospitals £12,000 a year.

The NHS is continually looking for ways to cut costs and cloth nappies offer a potential saving that will benefit families and cut costs for local authorities. It makes no sense to ignore this.

## **EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP**

Realising the benefits that cloth nappies can bring to the NHS and their clients, a number of hospitals and health professionals around the UK are already working with the real nappy campaign. Partnerships involving the local authority, NHS trust and local businesses are in operation in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The award winning West Sussex Real Nappy Initiative demonstrates how effective such partnerships can be. Here West Sussex County Council provides the funding to purchase the nappies used on the maternity wards in St Richard's Hospital, Chichester, The Princess Royal Hospital, Haywards Heath, and Worthing Hospital. A local nappy laundry provides a free service to the hospital, delivering a fresh supply of clean nappies and taking away the soiled ones to be washed to NHS standards. They also provide an awareness raising campaign so that parents are properly informed. The local authority offers a cash-back incentive to real nappy users whether they choose to wash their own or continue to use the laundry service. The scheme is financed by West Sussex County Council from savings made by diverting nappies from landfill. The

hospitals save on clinical waste costs while parents benefit from being enabled to make a fair and informed choice of nappy. The community benefits from the jobs created in the laundry service, which, in turn, gains a viable customer base to ensure its survival.

In the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital, Belfast, on-ward service is provided free by a not-for-profit laundry with funding from Belfast City Council through Better Belfast and Invest NI. Under the scheme which has trained 250 hospital and community midwives in the use of cloth nappies, mounted displays in ante-natal clinics and provided mothers and babies with on-ward experience of real nappies in the hospital, 14% of new babies in Belfast have tried cloth nappies at home. The laundry provides a subsidised service for up to three months and discount purchase of nappies for home laundry to families on low incomes. The scheme is planned to be extended to Altnagelvin Maternity Unit, Londonderry in 2004.

Surrey University worked with East Surrey Hospital Maternity Unit, a number of local authorities and a local laundry service to trial the introduction of the use of cloth nappies on the maternity ward in East Surrey Hospital. Sita Environmental Trust funded the research through the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme. Laundry service was provided to the maternity unit at the hospital by the local nappy laundry company. A free home trial of the nappy laundry service was offered to all mothers at the hospital, both before and after the introduction of cloth nappies on ward. It was found to be most effective when on ward use was combined with the incentive of a free home trial when 33% of the parents who intended to carry on using cotton nappies after their trial had originally intended to use disposable nappies for their baby. This reveals the impact achieved by introducing cloth nappies to the maternity ward with the potential to divert a significant proportion of disposable nappy waste both from the NHS clinical waste stream and from landfill.

Women's Environmental Network's website has details of many more schemes involving partnership between local authorities, the NHS and local business (see [www.wen.org.uk/nappypartnerships](http://www.wen.org.uk/nappypartnerships))

Partnership between local authorities and the NHS is evidently effective at promoting cloth nappies and preventing nappy waste. However such partnerships are still few and far between. A national policy encouraging the provision of real nappy information and education, the implementation of on-ward real nappy use and welcoming real nappy initiatives from local authorities, would facilitate the extension of such schemes in other areas and greatly help local authorities to reduce household waste.

## HOW THE NHS CAN HELP

Simply by providing information on cloth nappies the NHS can begin to redress the existing imbalance which favours disposable nappies and support Defra in their aim to reduce disposable nappy waste. However, evidence suggests that it is important that this information is given as early as possible and throughout the ante-natal educational system to post-natal support<sup>13</sup>.

The Government asserts its belief that women and their families should be given information on the use of both reusable and disposable nappies to make an informed choice.<sup>14</sup> The Pregnancy Book and Birth to Five which are produced by the Department of Health, and given free to all first time mothers do feature cloth nappies.

However, it is disingenuous to suggest that this is enough when mothers' experience in hospitals reaffirms their perception of disposable nappies as the norm. In the majority of NHS trusts, disposables are the only nappies in use. It is only in areas where there is a successful real nappy campaign that parents receive information on cloth nappies in the booking-in pack, see demonstrations of real nappies in ante-natal classes or get to try out a cotton nappy on their baby on the post-natal ward. Fair information on the nappy choices available to parents is scarcely available in the NHS. Is it right that a mother who can choose between two hospitals in her area, may receive information on cloth nappies in one hospital and none in another?

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<sup>13</sup> The Implementation and Evaluation of Cotton Nappy Provision at East Surrey Hospital Maternity Unit, David Uzzell and Rachel Leach, University of Surrey, September 2003

<sup>14</sup> Response to Parliamentary Question 154771

There is a lack of understanding of cloth nappies, even in Department of Health publications, which suggest that parents ask their midwife to show them how to fold/pin terry nappies if they decide to use them. Apart from a few sentences referring to shaped nappies and laundry services, the books refer to terry nappies. This reasserts the popular misconception that cloth nappies mean ‘terries’ whereas in fact there is a wide variety of modern shaped and self-fastening nappies and waterproof wraps<sup>15</sup>. The NHS could support DEFRA in achieving nappy waste reduction while benefiting parents by informing them of the whole range of nappy choices available.

The Department of Health asserts “it is for individual units and trusts to decide on the practicalities of promoting the use of terry nappies in their own maternity units”<sup>16</sup>. (Note the persistent reference to terries.) While the decision to adopt on-ward use of cloth nappies remains with the trusts and maternity units, the Department could help by adopting a policy encouraging the provision of cloth nappy information and on-ward cloth nappy use.

The study conducted into the implementation and evaluation of on-ward cotton nappy use at East Surrey Hospital Maternity Unit, by the University of Surrey in 2002-2003 reveals the effectiveness of NHS involvement in cloth nappy promotion to parents.

On-ward use of real nappies increases the likelihood of continued real nappy use beyond the trial period. After the on-ward scheme was introduced in East Surrey the proportion of parents who continued to use real nappies after the end of the free home trial period increased from 30% to 65%.

There is a need to improve on the level of information available from health professionals. Surrey University identified four main sources of information on nappies. 152 people gained information from other parents, 106 from the media, 67 from passive advertising such as supermarket shelves and Bounty packs, while only 26 were informed by health professionals. The situation needs to be improved to enable

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<sup>15</sup> Appendix 3, Cloth nappies - a range of choice

<sup>16</sup> Response to Parliamentary Question 154771

parents to make a fair choice rather than being influenced by market saturation and the disposable manufacturers' multi million pound advertising spend.<sup>17</sup>

To be most effective, information on real nappies should be made available as early as possible in pregnancy, preferably in the booking-in pack. The Surrey University study reveals that the decision to use cloth nappies occurs very early in pregnancy. This is confirmed by the laundry service which supplies cloth nappies to the maternity units in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire. They have found that there is a far higher take up rate from Lister Hospital, Stevenage where information is supplied in the booking-in pack than from Milton Keynes General Hospital and Bedford Hospital where it is provided at ante-natal classes. This is despite the fact that there is a free month's nappy laundry service trial on offer at Bedford as opposed to the 'four weeks for the price of three' offer at Lister Hospital.

Experience is important in the development of attitudes. Parents' perception of the ease of buying, using and washing cloth nappies was improved by the experience of using cloth nappies on-ward in East Surrey Hospital. Parents who tried out cotton nappies were more positive not only about their ability to use them, but also about their ability to wash cotton nappies.

Hospital experience matters. The Surrey survey found that parents' beliefs about how easy cotton nappies are to use is the main factor influencing the type of nappy that they will choose. When parents increasingly believe that using, washing and buying cotton nappies is easy, they will be more likely to use them. Information on cloth nappies in booking-in packs, demonstrations in ante-natal classes showing how easy it is to use and wash nappies, backed up with on-ward experience of real nappy use in the supportive environment of the hospital ward where help is at hand to guide the first few changes, will have a significant effect on the choices made by new parents. As parents are influenced by others' attitudes and practices, there will be a gradual cumulative effect where peer practice, NHS information and education and on-ward experience combine to provide the environment where UK parents are enabled to make a fair choice. The NHS can benefit parents and hospitals by playing its part.

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<sup>17</sup> Disposable Nappies and Baby Wipes, Market Intelligence, April 2002, 2001 Adspend on disposable nappies of £12.9 million.

## **THE CURRENT SITUATION - REAL NAPPY PROMOTION IN THE NHS**

The NHS is already involved in promoting real nappies in a number of different ways but due to the absence of NHS policy, coverage is patchy and inconsistent.

Examples include:

- On-ward hospital schemes with varying levels of supporting information, awareness raising, ante-natal education and user incentives.
- Real nappy information provided to parents by the NHS
- Health professionals equipped with nappy kits to educate and inform parents.
- Midwives trained in the benefits of real nappies.

### **ON-WARD REAL NAPPY USE**

There are currently at least 23 hospitals in the UK with an on-ward real nappy policy in their maternity wards. In addition, twelve other hospitals are considering introducing such a policy. Two of these are keen to start as soon as the necessary funding is in place.

In nearly all cases the change in policy has been brought about by the enthusiasm of a committed individual health professional. While that is commendable, what is needed is an overall real nappy policy in the NHS to encourage hospitals to promote real nappies and adopt an on-ward policy. At the moment, with stretched resources, and despite a lot of enthusiasm among midwives in the hospitals, the issue is still being avoided.

To support the work of DEFRA in reducing waste growth, to provide parents with a fair choice and for the NHS to benefit from the clinical waste cost savings, this needs to change. A policy change at national level would send the necessary signal to effect this change and encourage a shift from resistance to receptiveness at local level.

There are instances of a more concerted approach to on-ward policies. In the case of the West Sussex Real Nappy Initiative and East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Real Nappy

Network, all the maternity hospitals in these districts are involved in promoting real nappies as part of two exemplary local partnerships co-ordinated by the councils, involving local business and providing local employment.

### **How on-ward real nappy policies work**

There are two distinct types of hospital nappy laundering systems in place:

- on site laundry
- external nappy laundry service.

### **On Site Hospital Nappy Laundries**

Here nappies are used on-ward and laundered in the hospital's own in-house laundry. This system is in operation in Royal Oldham Hospital, Penrice Hospital, St Austell, Queens Park Hospital, Lancashire, Southern General Hospital, Glasgow and Hinchingsbrooke Hospital in Huntingdon; with Helston Community Hospital, Cornwall and John Radcliffe, Oxford considering introducing similar schemes. Under the scheme in Oldham, which was introduced to encourage real nappy use as an anti-poverty measure, nappies top up existing loads and do not add to the laundry costs of the hospital. Queens Park Hospital also provides nappies for use on the post-natal ward which are laundered on-site.

Penrice Hospital in St Austell started its three month trial of an on-ward scheme in July 2003. This was so successful that, with a few moderations, the trial has been continued for a further six months. The Southern General Hospital in Glasgow does not actively promote cloth nappies but has terries available for parents that need them and launders them on site. Hinchingsbrooke Hospital in Huntingdon provides a similar service to the Southern General.

### **External Nappy Laundry Service Provided by a Local Company**

Nappies used on the maternity ward are laundered by a local nappy laundry company. In some cases, the set up costs (buying nappies, bins, wraps etc.) are paid for by another party, such as the local authority, which may also fund the information for parents and the awareness raising campaign. Incentives are often offered to parents to encourage initial real nappy use when they go home: four weeks laundry service for

the price of three; free trial of the laundry service; cash back incentives which are staged to encourage continued real nappy use.

This sort of system has been trialled in Neville Hall Hospital, Gwent, East Surrey and Dorking Hospital and Edinburgh Royal Infirmary. Service laundered cloth nappies are used on ward in: Princess Royal Hospital, Haywards Heath; Worthing Hospital; St Richard's Hospital, Chichester; Royal Devon & Exeter Hospital; Honiton Hospital, Devon; Tiverton and District Hospital, Devon; Okehampton District and General Hospital, Devon; Royal Sussex County Hospital, Brighton; Eastbourne District General Hospital; Crowborough Birthing Centre; Royal Sussex County Hospital; East Surrey and Dorking Hospital; Royal Hampshire County Hospital; Lister Hospital, Stevenage; Milton Keynes General Hospital; Bedford Hospital; Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital, Belfast; William Julien Courtauld Hospital, Braintree; St Peter's Maternity Hospital, Maldon; and is due to be launched in Conquest Hospital, Hastings in April 2004.

**Some examples to date:**

Brighton & Hove and East Sussex Real Nappy Project has already introduced cloth nappy use to the Royal Sussex County Hospital, Eastbourne District General Hospital and Crowborough Birthing Centre. The scheme is to be extended to Conquest Hospital, Hastings in April 2004. The Project will fund the laundry service start up costs of £10-15,000 with free laundry service provided by a local nappy laundry company. The two local authorities benefit from the reduction in household waste as information on cloth nappies and on-ward use in the hospital environment leads to increased real nappy use.

Two different incentives are offered in Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire where nappy laundry is supplied by a local company. Parents of babies born at Bedford Hospital are offered the incentive of a month's free laundry service if they continue to use the laundry service when they return home. The scheme is funded by Get Real, Bedford County Council and Shanks, with free laundry service provided by the nappy laundry company. In Milton Keynes General Hospital and Lister Hospital, Stevenage, parents are offered four weeks laundry service for the price of three. In the initial trial period, 1,200 people used the nappy laundry service in combined trials at the three hospitals,

of whom up to a third continued to use the laundry service in addition to those who chose to launder their own at home.

Edinburgh Royal Infirmary ran a 16 week trial in 2003 and achieved a 26% take up rate. Community maternity team leaders were equipped with nappy packs while training seminars were arranged for staff from community midwifery and the maternity wards. 26% of mothers availed themselves of the opportunity to try real nappies on ward. This reflects the results in East Surrey Hospital. Funding is now being sourced to continue the scheme beyond the trial period.

### **REAL NAPPY EDUCATION AND INFORMATION IN THE NHS**

Some hospitals which already provide information to parents on real nappies and are considering implementing on-ward real nappy policies include Victoria Hospital, Blackpool; St George's Hospital, Tooting; Basildon Hospital; St Mary's Hospital, Portsmouth; Ipswich Hospital; The St Edmundsbury Hospital, Bury St Edmunds; The Rosie Hospital, Addenbrookes Hospital, Cambridge; St Mary's Hospital, Newport, Isle of Wight; Treliske Hospital, Cornwall; Neville Hall Hospital, Gwent; East Surrey and Dorking Hospital; Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

**There are many more hospitals around the UK providing information on washable nappies** in ante-natal classes, birth registration packs, booking-in packs and in parentcraft classes. These include Singleton Hospital, Swansea; Chelsea and Westminster Hospital; Queen Charlotte's and Chelsea Hospital; Ealing Hospital; Perth Royal Infirmary; Cresswell Maternity Hospital, Dumfries; St Mary's Hospital for Women and Children, Manchester; Clacton District Hospital, Essex; Worcestershire Royal Hospital; Beckenham Hospital; Princess Royal University Hospital, Farnborough; Raigmore Hospital, Inverness; Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust; Birmingham Women's Hospital; Good Hope Hospital, Birmingham; Birmingham Heartlands Hospital; Norfolk and Norwich NHS Trust; Cockermouth Cottage Hospital, Cumbria; Heath Hospital, Cardiff; Llandough Hospital, Penarth; Princess of Wales, Bridgend; Caerphilly Miners Hospital.

**In a number of real nappy projects around the UK the dissemination of information depends heavily on the participation of health professionals.**

The Sustainable Wales Real Nappy Campaign promotes the use of re-usable nappies throughout Wales. At the centre of the campaign is the promotion of cloth nappies in the NHS and informing parents of the choices they have regarding nappies.

Sustainable Wales has members of staff who work closely with health professionals in South East Wales and have integrated nappy information into the ante-natal programme through parentcraft classes, breastfeeding classes and baby clinics. Cotton nappy displays are in place in most hospitals including the Princess of Wales, Bridgend, Heath and Llandough hospitals in Cardiff, Singleton Hospital in Swansea and the Miners Hospital in Caerphilly. In addition leaflets and posters have been distributed to many GP surgeries and health clinics.

Members of the Sustainable Wales Real Nappy volunteer network are currently working with health professionals in other parts of Wales to develop a similar programme of activity.

A bilingual Real Nappy Fact Pack is currently being distributed to all health professionals across Wales and includes information about cotton nappies, a selection of promotional material, a sample cloth nappy and a promotional video for use at parentcraft classes.

Gloucestershire Get It Sorted Waste Campaign has worked with the Gloucestershire Real Nappy Project to ensure that mothers receive information on cloth nappies in their hospital booking packs, while sample packs of nappies are sent to midwives to enable demonstrations.

With funding from Brighton & Hove and East Sussex County Council, nappy boards are displayed in hospitals and doctor's surgeries throughout the county. Cloth nappies are used on the maternity wards in Royal Sussex County Hospital, Eastbourne District General Hospital and Crowborough Birthing Centre. Seminars are arranged for midwives and other health professionals who leave equipped with demonstration packs

or 'nappy kits'. New Deal areas are targeted for specific activity with display boards in clinics.

#### **HEALTH PROFESSIONALS EQUIPPED TO EDUCATE AND INFORM PARENTS**

'Nappy kits' containing a selection of nappies, training videos, leaflets and information packs are distributed to midwives and health visitors in the Isle of Wight, Cornwall, Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Edinburgh and Gloucester. These kits inform health professionals of the cost, environmental and health benefits of cloth nappies and equip them to demonstrate how real nappies are used. Information packs are distributed to health professionals in Dorset where they are widely used as a resource for ante-natal classes.

#### **MIDWIFE TRAINING**

A number of real nappy schemes have included seminars and other forms of training for midwives. Bournemouth University has agreed to include real nappy education as part of their Midwifery course. All midwife training programmes should be updated to include education on modern cloth nappy use so that midwives are enabled to provide accurate and fair information to parents on the nappy choices available to them.

## CONCLUSION

- The NHS is not providing parents across the UK with equal access to fair and impartial information about the full range of choices available to them
- In most hospitals, disposable nappies are being promoted by default, through their use on ward, in demonstrations and information given to parents, and free hand-outs with Bounty bags for new parents.
- In some cases, provision of cloth nappy information has been restricted due to contractual arrangements with Bounty.
- This situation and the Department of Health's failure to date to intervene undermines the Government's waste strategy. The Department of the Environment (Defra) has set a target to convert 155,000 households to real nappy use by 2006.
- Despite the absence of NHS policy, there are many good examples for implementing real nappy education and use in NHS hospitals: at least 23 hospitals around the UK are using cloth nappies on maternity wards.
- Where parents are given a fair choice, nappy waste is reduced and parents, health services and local councils all make savings.
- Given the chance to try them out, parents find cloth nappies easier to use than they thought.
- Parents introduced to cloth nappies while on the maternity ward and given incentives to try them out at home are more likely to continue using them once they return home- reducing their household waste.
- For every 100 maternity beds in UK hospitals, disposable nappies account for between seven and 10 tonnes of waste per year.
- Disposal of nappy waste costs maternity hospitals an estimated 58p to 88p per baby plus servicing and portering charges.
- The NHS spent £1.5m buying disposable nappies in 2002-3

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. The DoH should support Defra in implementing the Government strategy to reduce household waste and provide fair choice to parents by:

- a) welcoming existing hospital schemes which help councils reduce nappy waste;
- b) recognising the benefits real nappies can bring to health services, parents and local authorities, in reducing both costs and waste amounts;
- c) developing a policy to promote real nappy education, information and use in the health service, including:

- reform of arrangements with Bounty and similar schemes so that less wasteful choices can be freely and effectively promoted;
- real nappy information in the antenatal booking-in pack and at all subsequent contacts with parents and babies;
- training for all health professionals about the modern choice and use of real nappies;
- acknowledgement of the role real nappies play in the reduction of clinical waste, with its potential for cost saving and improved environmental performance in the NHS.

2. Health services could voluntarily adopt real nappy policies in advance of any national policy, following the examples set by various nappy partnerships around the country.

**ENDS.**

## Appendix 1

### Some examples where cloth nappies are promoted in disadvantaged areas:

Birmingham City Council ran a Which? style trial in a disadvantaged area. Of the 12 participants, which included two teenage mums, ten continued to use cloth nappies after the trial. Cost savings were the most significant factor in their decision to continue. Birmingham City Council has bought cloth nappies in bulk to provide at low cost and is now investigating setting up a laundry service in a disadvantaged area to provide local employment.

St Helen's local authority are providing a subsidised nappy laundry service for low-income families.

Environappies is a co-operative in Lancashire offering laundry service at cost.

In Hereford and Worcester discounted trial packs of nappies were distributed by PHP and Hereford and Worcester County Councils. Local Mothercare outlets have responded to the demand for budget nappies by retailing a low cost range.

The Recycling Consortium is working with Sure Start and community midwives to provide free trial packs and cost price nappies to low income families.

Shropshire Real Nappy Network is working with Sure Start and Fair Share Credit Union to provide loans to fund nappy purchase.

Warwickshire Waste Wise Real Nappy Project are working with the Credit Union to introduce a scheme to aid low income families with the initial purchase of real nappies.

BORN, the Belfast Organisation for Real Nappies is a not-for-profit organisation providing laundry service to the Royal Jubilee maternity unit in Belfast a subsidised

laundry service and discount purchase of nappies for home laundry to families on low incomes.

Brighton & Hove and East Sussex Real Nappy Project is working with Sure Start to promote real nappies to people on low income with loan schemes and low cost starter packs.

Sedgefield Borough Council is working with Sure Start to provide sample packs and a 20% discount on real nappies.

ReNappingG (Real Nappies in Greenhill, Coalville, Leics) is working with Sure Start and the Credit Union to encourage parents to save £7/wk during pregnancy so that enough money is available by the end of the pregnancy to buy nappies for their new born baby.

## Appendix 2

### Real Nappy Pilot Scheme at Princess Anne Wing, RUH, Bath and Paulton Hospital January 2002

The use of real washable nappies on the wards of the Princess Anne Wing, RUH, Bath and Paulton Hospital will have far reaching beneficial effects for the hospitals and for the local community.

#### Benefits to the hospitals

##### a) Cost

**Disposable nappies** At present (January 2002) parents are requested to bring disposable nappies into the hospitals for use on their new babies. The hospital, therefore, incurs minimal costs in providing disposable nappies but their disposal, as clinical waste, is expensive.

From the waste audits in other hospitals, approximately 10% of the clinical waste produced by a maternity unit is made up of disposable nappies.

All figures are approximate.

**Births per year in PAW + Paulton = 3,500**

To assess the number of nappies used it will be easier to assume that each of the 50 beds (post natal and labour wards), is occupied for 24 hours a day during which time 3 nappy changes are carried out (this allows for quieter and busier times).

**number of disposables used per year = 54,000**

Weight of 4 soiled disposable nappies = 1Kg  
**so weight of 54,000 = 13.5 metric tonnes**

Clinical waste disposal costs are approximately £300.00 per metric tonne (and costs are set to increase)

**So cost of disposal = £4000 pa**

There are also additional costs incurred each month:

Cleaning of clinical waste bins (a. £50.00 /hospital /month) = **£1200 pa**

Staff time for collecting ward bins and emptying them  
(a. £100.00 /month) = **£1200 pa**

**Total disposal costs of disposable nappies over both hospitals = £6400 pa**

These costs have to be paid every year and will steadily rise.

**Washable nappies** The pilot project will run for 6 months in both hospitals. Supplies of nappies, wraps and bins - if not available in the hospital - will be provided by the Real Nappy Project. The nappy laundry service, Dinky Diapers, will collect, deliver and

launder the nappies. They will offer this service free of charge during the 6 months pilot scheme but are keen that parents are made aware of their service.

**The hospitals will therefore incur no charges for 6 months.**

**After the pilot scheme** The initial supplies of nappies and wraps are expected to remain in good condition for at least a year. After that period they will gradually need to be replaced. At present (January 2002) the nappies cost £1.00 each and the wraps cost £3.00 each. The ordering, storing and replacing of the nappies and wraps can be organised by the nappy laundry. It is suggested that the hospital allocate a monthly budget to buying nappies and wraps.

Replacement costs approx.	= £1,200 pa
nappy laundry approx. £200/month	= £2,400 pa
Total costs per annum	= £3,600 pa
TOTAL SAVINGS (approx.)	= £3,200 pa

#### **b) Publicity for the hospitals**

The launch of the pilot scheme will be a big publicity event! The use of washable nappies on the wards will reinforce the message that the hospitals are environmentally aware both on their own premises and within the communities that they serve. It will also show that the NHS Trust is always working to reduce its costs and use its budget in the best possible way.

### **Benefits to the community**

Maternity staff are experts in baby care. If the maternity units and staff endorse and actively encourage the use of washable nappies the message will be taken seriously. It is hoped, and it is the experience of other hospitals, that a significant number of parents will use washable nappies when they return home if they are introduced to their use in hospital. Use in hospital will reinforce the information that parents will, hopefully have gained about washable nappies at their ante natal classes.

The benefits to parents are enormous. They can be assured that they are helping to look after our environment, especially if they use a nappy laundry, the most energy efficient method of washing nappies. There are no concerns about chemicals next to their babies' skin or other health considerations. If they choose to wash at home they will save at least £500 with the first baby (and more with subsequent ones), even including washing costs.

The community will also benefit from the reduction in the number of disposable nappies going to landfill sites. B&NES Council and South Gloucestershire Council currently each spend about £310,000 a year on dealing with disposable nappies in domestic waste - money that could be better spent elsewhere!

## **Methodology of pilot scheme**

The Real Nappy pilot scheme will only be successful if there is a firm hospital policy that real, not washable nappies are used on the ward.

The Real Nappy Project will buy and supply the nappies, wraps and bins (if necessary) for the pilot scheme. The nappy laundry service, Dinky Diapers, will carry out the day to day running of the scheme, free of charge for the length of the pilot (6 months) - for details see the Dinky Diapers report.

### **Promotion of the scheme to parents**

Many parents may be concerned that the use of washable nappies is messy, time consuming and ineffective. It is important that these concerns are addressed. It is suggested that when parents are sent their list of requirements for their stay in hospital it is stated that washable nappies will be used and that if parents wish to use disposables then there are no disposal facilities for them in the hospital. It is also important that parents are encouraged to change the nappies rather than the midwives so that they are aware of the washable nappy.

It is important, too, that posters and an information folder are displayed on the wards. When parents leave the hospital they will need to be able to find out details of the nappy laundries or where to buy washable nappies and how to wash them at home.

### **Training**

The Real Nappy Project team and the nappy laundry staff will discuss the day to day running of the scheme with the midwifery staff and ensure that there are good methods of communication. So that the midwifery staff can give parents full information about washable nappies there will also be training on the different types of washable nappies that are available, home washing instructions and contact details for parents.

Since midwifery staff are often very busy, the nappy teams will also be willing, when possible, to talk to parents on the wards about all aspects of washable nappies.

### **Time scale**

It is proposed that the launch of the pilot scheme, with a media event, takes place during Real Nappy Week (April 22<sup>nd</sup> - 28<sup>th</sup> 2002) in each of the 2 hospitals.

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January 29<sup>th</sup> 2002

## Initial set up costs

### PAW

Birth rate per year - 3,280

To assess the number of nappies and wraps required it will be easier to assume that each of the 50 beds (post natal and labour wards), is occupied for 24 hours a day (this allows for quieter and busier times) during which time 5 nappy changes are carried out.

50 beds @ 5 nappy changes per bed = 250 nappy changes per day.

If the nappy laundry collects and delivers 3 times a week we will initially buy 1000 nappies (more can be purchased if required). This will allow 500 to be on the wards (2 days supply) and 500 to be at the laundry.

Allowing for the wraps being changed only twice in 24 hours we will need 300 wraps in total (150 new born and 150 small size).

1000 nappies @ £1.00 each	= £1000
300 wraps @ £3.00 each	= £900
Total	= £1,900

Each ward will need 2 pedal operated bins for the dirty nappies. It is hoped that the hospital can provide these. If not,

6 bins @ at £80.00 each = £480

Total budget requirements for nappies, wraps and bins  
= £2,380

### Paulton Hospital

Births per year = 188

50 nappies + 20 wraps + 1 bins should suffice = £190

Total for both hospitals = £2,570

## Appendix 3

### Cloth nappies - a range of choice

**Flat nappies** include traditional terries, prefolds, muslins, and continental tie-on nappies which are available from around £2 per nappy. All cheap and versatile, they need some folding to fit the baby, and a waterproof cover, but they are very economic and quick drying. Even terries have changed - no pins required if you use a nifty little plastic device or special wraps.

**Shaped nappies** usually require a waterproof cover. Shaped and fitted, with elasticated legs and waist, they generally have a neater fit than flat nappies and are even easier to put on. Most have Velcro fixings, some use poppers. They wash and dry easily and can be bought from around £4 each.

**All-in-ones** are supremely easy to use, as the shaped, fitted nappy with Velcro or popper fastenings has a built-in waterproof cover. Not as durable as two part systems, and taking longer to dry, these are nonetheless the easiest cloth nappies to use, notably when hurried or out and about. Available from around £8 each.

**Covers** - Most new-style covers are soft, breathable and machine washable. Fabrics vary from waterproofed nylon, polyester or cotton to wool, and styles range through popper and Velcro fastening to pull-on, all of them allowing for quick and easy nappy changes.