

Case study



Reusable period products –

A sustainable alternative that supports independence and dignity

Jackie Gordon
Sharon Campana

Reusable period products –

A sustainable alternative that supports independence and dignity



Jackie Gordon

About Jackie

Before I became an occupational therapist I worked in international development, supporting women in income generating projects and education abroad – issues of equality and self-determination and environmental issues have always been important to me.

As an occupational therapist I have worked in many areas over the years – for example in social services, community and hospital and school settings. I now work in acute neurology at Great Ormond Street Hospital (GOSH).

I've found that occupational therapy needs are similar in different settings – activities of daily living continue. Often the best solutions are the simplest and this is when I thought about using period pants for people struggling to manage pads and tampons because of the limitations of their *body structures and function*.

As part of the GOSH Green Champions Group, I was working with others to reform working practices and to consider what areas of OT we could make more sustainable. I cycled to Scotland with a group in October 2021 for COP26 and met people on the way who have become good friends and are mentors and supporters. One of these *inspiring people persuaded me to stand as a Staff Governor and I was elected in Jan 2022*. This has given me insight into how decisions are made and how things are managed at a strategic level in a hospital and how that links with other services. It has also given me a voice and place to feedback on staff concerns and observations.

About the Innovation

On review of the numbers of female inpatients admitted to the hospital in a year, approximately 1 in 12 females over the age of 10* may experience a period, maybe for the first time, during an admission to hospital; anaesthetic induced menstruation is common. This can be daunting and difficult to manage, particularly if your ability to use period products, such as pads and tampons is affected by a *physical limitation, such as hemiplegia*. In March 2019, NHS England made a pledge that period products will be available to those who require them in all hospitals (NHS England 2019). Jackie and her colleagues (see below 'who did you work with?') identified both a gap in available provision but also a solution that would allow for increased independence and dignity, whilst contributing to the NHS Net Zero target (NHSE 2022).

To move this proposal forward, Jackie and her colleagues researched and accessed the data to both establish the need, review current provision and demonstrate the environmental and financial value in recommending Period Pants as a safe alternative to single use products.

Initially the group received some products as donations from WUKA® and Modibodi®, sustainable period product companies. The clinicians worked with the Communications Team to create information on sustainable Period Products for the website (GOSH 2022) and information leaflets were produced to be accessed via the website and Electronic Patient Record (EPR), including shorter versions to that could be displayed as posters throughout the Trust site.

Jackie and her colleagues also recognised that menstruation needed to be discussed early with patients to prepare them and direct them to appropriate resources. They then worked with the EPR team to update the configuration of the system to include questions and prompts within the pre-operation documentation. Links were also configured within this to signpost colleagues to period product information. Options were explored to fund ongoing provision; initial procurement was via a special project fund through the Occupational Therapy Department and an NHS Futures Fund grant application was successful as well.

Jackie recognised the importance of patient feedback to review the impact of this project, and a feedback survey was created. This is now in an electronic format with a QR code created by the Quality Improvement team which makes it quick and easy to complete and allows for immediate collation for analysis. A paper copy could be printed if necessary for equity of access. The scheme has been submitted as a formal Quality Improvement pilot project.

*Figures based on average admission numbers in a year at GOSH.

Digital tools to access or supply information, and to improve the workflow around provision of period products and their benefits:

Digital tool	Benefits
Website resources	Universally available, clear, concise, searchable, active links to more information
Printable electronic resources	Can be viewed electronically or printed for equity of access
Digital questionnaire with collation capabilities	Ease of access, quick to complete, anonymised responses, automatic collation for timely analysis
EPR configuration	Consistent, supports universal recognition of patient need, downstream triggers (potential for decision support/machine learning technologies), discrete data collection
Communication tools (internal and external) e.g. blogs, online articles, emails, and e-newsletters, remote meeting facilities	Collaboration with colleagues and experts, dissemination of information, sharing of learning to other contexts and organisations

Who did you work with?

- The Occupational Therapy team
- Advanced Nurse Practitioner.
- Palliative Care Consultant.
- GOSH's Sustainability Green Champions.
- Electronic Patient Record Configuration Analyst.
- Quality Improvement team.
- Communications Team.
- Head of Occupational Therapy.

What data and digital tools were required?

Data to understand and demonstrate:

- procurement/finance data to review current provision, spend and potential budget
- carbon footprint of period products e.g., implications of washing
- financial implication of period products, single use vs reusable
- safety of reusable products
- number of patients affected
- patient, parent/carer, staff feedback on experience.

Benefits of the project

Person	Sustainability	Organisation
Promotion of independence, dignity, empowerment, access to activities, confidence and equality. Financial benefits as the cost of living continues to rise.	Reduce carbon impact of production and transportation of disposable product. Reduce waste generation and impact of plastic disposables process. Reduce plastic pollution in the ocean. Transferable to other contexts	Improved patient/carer and staff experience Long term financial savings (particularly for long term patients) Adherence to NHSE guidelines. Contribution to Net Zero target for NHS.

Digital and Data Competencies

From the AHP Digital Competency Framework (HEE 2020) (Paraphrased for conciseness, please see framework for full details).

Domain 1: General

- Use of digital/online resources for obtaining/sharing information.
- Foundational computer skills.

Domain 2: Data Management and Clinical Informatics

- Locate, access, visualise and evaluate data for quality improvement.

Domain 3: Records, Assessments and Plans

- Input into the design of an EPR to facilitate innovations and improve documentation and patient experiences.

Domain 8: Decision Support

- Use of EPR configuration to facilitate decision support to direct patient pathway and practice.

Domain 9: Digital Therapeutics

- Creation of, and direction to health and care information.

Domain 10: Meta-competencies

- Build relationships with key stakeholders for transformation.
- Using digital technology as part of Quality Improvement.
- Awareness of external drivers for change.

Engagement in Career Development

From the – Career Development Framework (RCOT 2022) (Paraphrased for conciseness, please see framework for full details)

Professional Practice:

- actively listen and reflection on needs of young people and families
- share and justify viewpoint succinctly with managers and decision makers
- role-model advanced communication skills
- utilise formal systems for obtaining feedback
- contribute to strategies and practices that challenge stigma and discussion and that promote participation.

Leadership:

- actively work with others to use policy drivers to share services
- lead the response to and influence the cultural, social, political, and economic climates, locally, nationally and internationally
- Create and promote opportunities to pioneer innovations.

Impact:

Improved patient/carer experience with positive feedback:

“Complete game changer! My daughter can now manage her periods without me.” (anon.)

“Saved money – much cheaper in the long run”. (anon.)

Positive feedback from secondary benefit of staff taking up reusable menstrual products whilst at work and to replace some of their single use products:

“Period pants - great idea! Mostly wear them at work leading up so there are no desperate toilet dashes, especially working on PICU when you just don't know when that will be. And towards the end when anything else seems wasteful. I really don't like wearing them to the gym and can't quite fully transition to them.” (anon.)

Ripple effect: Jackie has already heard that Year 7 students in 3 London Boroughs are being provided with period pants (council funded) on the back of this project.

Many colleagues at work are now using these products themselves and recommending to friends and family especially friends with young teenagers.

A group of Occupational Therapists in a local special school are now recommending these for young people with profound learning disabilities.

Lessons learned

'I have learnt that small things really matter and it's those things that also stop people getting involved. We all suffer from imposter syndrome! We have important things to say and ideas to share but OT's tend to think it's just common sense!' (Jackie)

Words of wisdom

Focus on who can support with specific elements, what can you do and what do you need others to support with, for example: *'the electronic questionnaire took someone who could do it about 15 minutes to sort out – they had returned to me the same afternoon. I had puzzled for hours about how to make it accessible!'* (Jackie)

Useful elements to investigate:

- available sources of data
- record keeping methods
- potential alert systems
- support networks (digital/data or project theme specific)
- feedback mechanisms
- communication mechanisms

Next steps

Collate data and feedback for submission of a formal business case for these products to be available via the Trust Procurement system.

Share widely - this innovation is transferable across different many different Occupational Therapy contexts within the NHS, Education and Local Authority (e.g. SEN Education Settings, Adult Social Care and similar products for urinary incontinence). All benefits are also transferable to the general population too!

Hear more from Jackie as part of a series of Data and Innovation focused pre-recorded Webinars available on the RCOT Data and Innovation strategy webpage

Authors

Jackie Gordon

Clinical Specialist Occupational Therapist

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust

Sharon Campana

Expert Topic Lead for Data and Innovation and Allied Health Information Officer at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Foundation Trust

References

Health Education England (2020) Development of a digital competency framework for UK Allied Health Professionals. Available online: <https://www.hee.nhs.uk/our-work/digital-literacy/profession-service-specific-digital-capabilities> Accessed: 2nd September 2022

NHS England (2019) News: The NHS in England will offer free tampons and other sanitary products to every hospital patient who needs them (12th March 2019). Available online: NHS England » The NHS in England will offer free tampons and other sanitary products to every hospital patient who needs them Accessed: 24th October 2022

NHS England (July 2022) Delivering a 'Net Zero' National Health Service. Available online: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs/publication/delivering-a-net-zero-national-health-service/>. Accessed: 24th October 2022

RCOT (2022) Career Development Framework. Available Online: <https://www.rcot.co.uk/publications/career-development-framework>. Accessed: 2nd September 2022.

Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children (2022) Period Products. Available online: Period products | Great Ormond Street Hospital (gosh.nhs.uk). Accessed 5th November 2022