

Hospital curtains & screens:

Infection control and privacy and dignity drive innovation in the market

Following tradition

Traditional fabric curtains are being made in a range of colours and designs to enhance the patient experience

Bug-busting

There is a growing market for disposable curtains, with trusts recognising the impact on infection prevention

Stars of the screen

In some trusts curtains are being replaced with screens, which are easier to clean



The Silentia screens are fixed to the wall with two screws and can be wiped down quickly and easily if soiled

Our data suggests that hospital curtains have the potential to contribute to contamination of healthcare workers' hands – the major source of transmission of nosocomial pathogens

Exploring the impact of modern healthcare services on the design and procurement of hospital curtains and screens

This special report explores the procurement of hospital curtains and how patient safety and infection control are driving the replacement of traditional fabric drapes with disposable products and, more recently, hard-surface screens. We look at what NHS trusts are looking for and how manufacturers are responding to their demands

Over the past few years a large number of new-build hospital developments have been created, providing single-room accommodation for patients. However, the majority of hospitals in the UK still house people in multi-bed wards, traditionally with a curtain that can be pulled round each bay in order to provide a degree of privacy.

Historically these curtains have been made from fabric and are changed and cleaned as part of the wider laundry services policy.

But, over the past decade, as infection prevention and control and patient dignity have become NHS buzzwords, estates and facilities managers have had to think much more carefully about the products they purchase.

A touch of colour

Firstly, boring neutral-coloured curtains are largely a thing of the past, with a number of manufacturers offering designer collections that fit with the interior design of hospital wards. For example, drapilux has expanded its 215 and 221 collections to include three new ranges of colourful designs.

“A stay in hospital is not usually associated with enjoyment,” said a company spokesman. “This is why it is all the more important that a sense of wellbeing can be achieved for the patients, thus helping to create a positive atmosphere and promote a speedy recovery. Colours and shapes form an integral part of this process – in terms of wall design, furnishings and decorative textiles.

“Bare walls, cold lighting, sparse decorations - these are not the words generally used to describe an inviting atmosphere, and yet in many clinics,

where a feel-good factor can have a significant effect on the recovery process, such a mundane atmosphere is still very much the standard.

“Our new ranges have been developed especially for use in clinics, introducing cheerful colours and inspiring patterns into day-to-day hospital life.”

The company's in-house textile designer, Kirstin Hermann, added: “Colours not only symbolise emotions, but can also influence our moods. Both the shade and intensity play a key role. Pastel shades have a friendly and cheerful effect, while vibrant colours will stimulate, invigorate and cheer up any room.

“With our selection of colours, we have concentrated on cooler nuances which convey a touch of spring. These modern and classic shades complement each other perfectly in harmonious arrangements, while a white background provides an optimal base for colourful accents, underpinning the cheerful, fresh and clear character of the designs.”

Bug-busting technology

But how the curtains look is just one of several considerations hospital managers face when deciding which products to procure. And it is one of these drivers that has seen the biggest step change in the way curtains are selected.

Infection prevention and control plays a significant part in modern hospital procurement activity, and this is no less true for curtains. In response to this threat, in recent years an estimated 50% of hospitals in the UK have made the switch from fabric to disposable products. ▶



Grosvenor recently kitted out wards at Whipps Cross Hospital

In terms of cost, hospitals save on laundering bills as curtains are merely taken down and completely replaced every three to six months. Where a fabric curtain may cost in excess of £100, disposable equivalents are around £20 each. There is also a time saving as it can take more than 20 minutes to take traditional curtains down and another 20 minutes to hang new ones. Most disposable ranges can be pulled down in just two or three minutes and hung in around the same time.

In terms of infection control, research carried out by Floyd Trillis et al¹ found that 42% of traditional fabric privacy curtains were contaminated with vancomycin-resistant enterococci, 22% with MRSA and 4% with C.difficile. The report states: "Our data suggests that hospital curtains have the potential to contribute to contamination of healthcare workers' hands – the major source of transmission of nosocomial pathogens."

Recognising this threat, drapilux has introduced antimicrobial bioaktiv fabrics, where silver ions are incorporated into the threads of its disposable range in order to destroy bacteria in the cell structure and help fight against harmful germs.

All In One Medical has also seen increased interest from the NHS for its disposable curtain ranges. Director, Tim Powell told BBH: "Hospitals that have

used disposable curtains have seen a marked reduction in infections such as Norovirus, MRSA and C.difficile.

Traditional v Disposable

"In a traditional environment you may have two patients next to each other and if a nurse visits the patient on the left, pulls the curtains round then touches them, if that patient is infected then when the nurse pulls the curtains back again, that infection is going to be transferred onto the fabric. Then a doctor might come along to see the patient on the right and as they pull the curtain round again, this infection could be transferred to the other patient and so on.

"Our curtains are the only product of this type in the UK that are made from non-woven polypropylene and treated with Fantex's polymer-based antimicrobial coating proven to offer long-lasting biocidal protection."

Recognising, as drapilux has, the impact of interior design on the overall patient experience, All In One Medical also has an eye-catching printed range, which includes options for children, teenagers and adults.

Marlux is another NHS supplier that offers disposable bug-busting curtains in a range of different designs.

A spokesman said: "Usually, hospital curtains are the only item not routinely changed before a new patient is ►

Hospitals that have used disposable curtains have seen a marked reduction in infections such as Norovirus, MRSA and C.difficile

The very best NHS policy only intends to routinely change the cubicle curtains four times a year and many hospitals openly admit that they have no specific policy other than to ‘fire-fight’ changing curtains from one infection outbreak to the next



Marlux Medical curtains utilise Microban 3G Silver technology, which prevents the growth of harmful bacteria

admitted to hospital. Bed and lockers are disinfected, freshly laundered sheets and pillowcases are put on the bed, but the patient inherits the same dirty bed curtain from the last patient, the one before that, and the one before that.

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Marlux curtains utilise Microban 3G Silver technology, which prevents the growth of bacteria. It has produced a cost comparison chart² which shows the capital cost of fitting conventional curtains into a six-bedded ward is around £1,950; while disposable curtains would cost £185. A spokesman at disposable curtain supplier, Grosvenor Contracts, said this cost can even be as low as £75 depending on the product.

A spokesman for Opal Contracts which offers a range of fast-fit disposable curtains in a variety of plain colours and patterns, said "Opal has been supplying the NHS for numerous years and whilst they can offer an anti-microbial curtain, recent discussions in both the UK and Europe on the resilience of bacterium and the danger some anti-microbial products may have

to the environment has encouraged Opal to offer a truly disposable product which does not support bacterial growth without having a detrimental effect on the environment. Recycling and recovery options are also available offering a fully traceable audit trail from manufacture to disposal."

As well as helping to drive down infection rates, privacy screens or curtains also have to be fire retardant and, particularly in more challenging environments such as mental health units, they have to be ligature free.

The Grosvenor Contracts spokesman said: "Anti-ligature fixtures and fittings are important and this is something manufacturers are having to consider alongside infection prevention. The increased number of trusts using anti-ligature systems means we now have ways of fitting all items with anti-ligature technology, even disposable curtains.

“Originally disposable curtains were quite expensive, but over the last few years they have come down in cost and most health trusts when retendering are going down the disposable route.”

In addition to being anti-ligature, Grosvenor’s curtains are also fully recyclable and do not contain any harmful chemicals or carcinogens. They are available through the NHS Supply Chain framework, which speeds up procurement for health trusts.

“We are a great believer in the framework to get sustainably-priced items to smaller NHS sites while providing rebates back into the NHS,” the spokesman added.

Dividing opinion

But all good things come in threes and there is now a third option available, and one that takes infection control yet another step forward – dividing screens. These are increasingly being accepted as the infection control gold standard as they create hard surfaces, which can be cleaned and decontaminated every day and between patients in much the same way as bed rails, over-bed tables and chairs routinely are.

Tim Clarke, deputy managing director at Lisclare, which distributes Silentia screens, explained: “Our screens are hard surfaces that are integrated into ►



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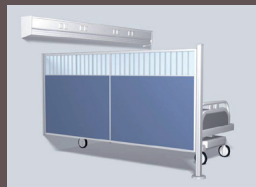
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◀ part of the building by being attached to the wall. They can be cleaned in situ and if you get a spill of body fluid, it can

wanted a new solution that was easy to clean and would reduce laundry bills. In total, 157 screens of seven or nine



All In One Medical offers printed disposable curtains designed specifically for children, teenagers or adults

Originally disposable curtains were quite expensive, but over the last few years they have come down in cost and most health trusts when retendering are going down the disposable route

be cleaned there and then and you can keep on going knowing it has been decontaminated. As the daily routine of cleaning beds, walls and floors is carried out, the screens become part of that and if something spills it can be wiped off immediately.”

In terms of cost, he added: “If you are taking on a new-build development then, as far as I can establish, the cost of screens over curtains, with the associated rails and laundering costs, is actually not that different. This is based on a doctor’s surgery we fitted out where it was around the same price as the quote given for curtains without the ongoing costs of replacing disposable or laundering reusable curtains.”

A private matter

The screens also meet regulations in relation to privacy and dignity and it was for this reason that Silentia products were installed at Scotland’s Golden Jubilee National Hospital.

The facility has single patient rooms and previously pull-around curtains were used to give patients privacy if the doors were left open. But managers

panels wide were installed in a white shade so they would show any staining and encourage cleaning. The screens have patented hinge technology designed not to trap dirt and the castors are removable to enable them to be washed separately. They are fixed to the walls with two screws. As an added bonus, they reduce sound travel by around 20%, allowing private conversations to be held when they are fitted into multi-bay environments.

At the Golden Jubilee National Hospital, staff nurse, Anne McKinley, said: “With the screens you can easily wipe them down. If they’re stained in any way - with blood or body fluids – they are cleaned by nursing staff and if there’s been an infection we use a chlorine-based detergent/disinfectant.”

Housekeeper, Mary Filshie, added: “I’ve been at the hospital for 10 years. Before, if the curtains were dirty or had stains we had to get a porter to take them down, replace them with another curtain, and take the soiled one to the laundry for cleaning, so it could delay the use of the room and take the porter away from their duties. Now we have

the screens we don't have to get in touch with the porters. We clean each patient room once a day and also give them a check clean. The screens are cleaned with a damp cloth – a single cloth for each screen - with detergent or disinfectant when necessary.”

Clarke said: “I think the NHS is beginning to understand the benefits and are justifying procurement through business cases. We expect to install more of the screens over the coming months and years.”

References

- 1: www.icpmedical.com/assets/pdfs/Article%20on%20Curtain%20Cross%20contamination%20USA.pdf
- 2: www.marbast.eu/documents/discussion_document_opt.pdf



The drapilux series specially developed for hospital use brings fresh colours and inspiring patterns into day-to-day life

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