

Assessing Obstetrician-Gynecologists' Knowledge, Practices, and Attitudes toward Waste Management in Healthcare: A Survey Study

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Introduction. Healthcare industry is a major contributor to global carbon emissions. In the United States, a substantial portion is linked to solid waste, with a single hospital bed generating 29 pounds of waste per day, approximately 30% of which is attributable to the operating room. Much of this waste results from improper disposal of items requiring specific processing. Authors of this study assessed obstetrician-gynecologists' knowledge, practices, and perceptions regarding proper waste management.

Methods. Authors conducted a cross-sectional survey among practicing obstetrician-gynecologists listed with the Kansas Board of Healing Arts or affiliated with the University of Kansas School of Medicine. Clinically inactive physicians were excluded. Survey questions addressed demographics, knowledge of appropriate surgical waste disposal, waste management practices, and perceptions regarding waste management. IRB approval was obtained. Categorical variables were reported as frequencies and percentages.

Results. Of 46 respondents, most agreed they understood the environmental impact of medical waste (81.1%, 30/37), and 86.5% (32/37) expressed concern about their personal contributions to the climate crisis. Proper waste disposal was considered important by physicians (96.9%, 31/32) and, in respondents' view, by their patients (89.2%, 33/37). Regarding their primary surgical facility, 25.6% (11/43) reported being unaware of the facility's waste management plan, and 34.9% (15/43) reported their facility did not recycle. All respondents incorrectly identified items that should be placed in red biohazard waste bags for chemotherapy patients.

Conclusions. While most physicians are concerned about the environmental impact of their medical practice, education and institutional resources related to waste management do not appear to match that concern. These findings highlight a significant opportunity to improve waste management education and practices within healthcare facilities.