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Financial and Environmental impact of waste NHS Equipment:

In July 2022, the NHS became the first health system to embed net zero into legislation. Each trust and integrated care system should have a green plan which sets out its aims and plans for carbon reduction. Despite this, half of NHS trusts are not on track to meet decarbonisation targets.

NHS England states that walking aids can be “safely refurbished and reused repeatedly”, saving hospitals money and reducing emissions. Schemes for returning and reusing walking aids are managed locally and I understand that a number of NHS trusts have local return and reuse schemes with over 200 return sites listed on the Recycle Now website. However, the Government does not collect data centrally and so the scale of waste or reuse is not fully known.

When it comes to reusing medication, I am aware that patients can be assisted through schemes such as the New Medicines Service, which provides support to patients newly prescribed certain medicines. As part of the Electronic Repeat Dispensing service, pharmacies are required to make sure that the patient still needs all of their medicines and dispense only what the patient needs.

However, the Government advises that it is not possible to assure the quality of returned medicines or guarantee that medicines have been stored or handled appropriately when kept in people’s homes. It therefore does not support the repurposing of returned medication.

I agree that tackling waste and inefficiency within the NHS is hugely important. I want to see action to crack down on those who profited from waste during the pandemic through failed and overpriced personal protective equipment contracts, including for equipment that could not be used.

I also believe we need to build an NHS that is fit for the future, joining up health and care services in the community. I want to see technology harnessed to improve patient care, to shift our focus to prevention, tackle health inequalities and enable more people to live well for longer.

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