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Can corporate social responsibility and environmental citizenship be employed in the effective management of waste? Case studies from the National Health Service (NHS) in England and Wales

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Abstract

This paper explores the effectiveness of employing the concepts of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and environmental citizenship in the management of healthcare waste in England and Wales. The study employed interviews and literature surveys of four award winning case study National Health Service (NHS) Trusts in both countries. The paper discusses the main drivers for the use of the concepts, factors governing their effective implementation such as senior management support, and key benefits to be accrued including costs savings, waste minimisation and closer links between the Trusts and their communities.
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1. Introduction

Within the past 25–30 years a number of environmental policies have emphasised the need for greater environmental responsibility and the development of strategies that encourage more sustainable practices, at the international level. Formally, this drive began with the 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Environment, and included the 1977 UNESCO Conference on Environmental Education, the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN, 1980), the Brundtland Report of 1987 (WCED, 1987) and the United Nations Summit in Rio Brazil in 1992 (UNCED, 1992). In England and Wales, all of the recent key Government 'environmental' strategies have sought to encourage greater consideration of social equity, healthy lifestyles, protection for the environment, and sustainable use of natural resources, within a stable economic framework (e.g. DETR, 2000; Welsh National Assembly, 2002; DEFRA, 2005, 2006a).

At the organisational level, management of the physical environment is considered to be one of the 'pillars' that underpin the contribution of businesses to sustainable development (Williamson et al., 2006). The effective management of waste through minimisation, recycling and reuse is one strategy via which sustainability can be achieved (DETR, 2000; DEFRA, 2005). Within businesses, environmental citizenship and corporate social responsibility (CSR) have begun to play an increasing role in the realisation of sustainability (Williamson et al., 2006; Henderson, 2007). Whilst there have been various studies focused on the use of CSR and environmental citizenship for environmental management both at the national level (Abeysuriya et al., 2007) and in the private sector (Jenkins and Yakovleva, 2006; Henderson, 2007; Falck and Heblich, 2007),

there have been fewer studies in the public sector, particularly within a UK context (Griffiths, 2006).

Even though there has been much research in England and Wales on the management of waste streams such as household and municipal waste, limited attention has been paid to health-care waste (HCW) management (Tudor, 2007). Indeed, despite the fact that HCW has been identified as a waste stream that requires the adoption of Best Practice (DETR, 2000), within the National Health Service (NHS) the management of this waste has traditionally received limited attention. The NHS is the main agency for the provision of healthcare services in England and Wales and is also the largest organisation in the UK (The NHS, 2006).

This study set out to examine the role of CSR and environmental citizenship in the effective management of HCW within the NHS. It was based on research undertaken within four award winning NHS Trusts in different geographical regions in England and Wales (Fig. 1). Each of these case study NHS Trusts has received national awards for their resource management. The Trusts included the five (at the time of the study, now three) NHS Trusts in Cornwall in the Southwest of England, Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust in Northwest England, as

well as Cardiff and Vale NHS Trust and North Glamorgan NHS Trust which are both in Southeast Wales.

2. Environmental citizenship and corporate social responsibility (CSR)

According to Hawthorne and Alabaster (1999) environmental citizenship is an 'outcome of education for sustainability' related to 'changing people's attitudes, providing access to knowledge and developing skills which combine to influence behaviour'. It is comprised of a number of 'discrete', but 'related' concepts including information sharing, awareness building, concern, attitudes/beliefs, education and training, knowledge, skills, literacy and responsible behaviour. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has been defined as EC (2001):

A concept where companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with stakeholders on a voluntary basis.

The main objectives of CSR are that the actions of the business should benefit the economy, society and the environment, with 'wider responsibilities beyond commerce' (Henderson,
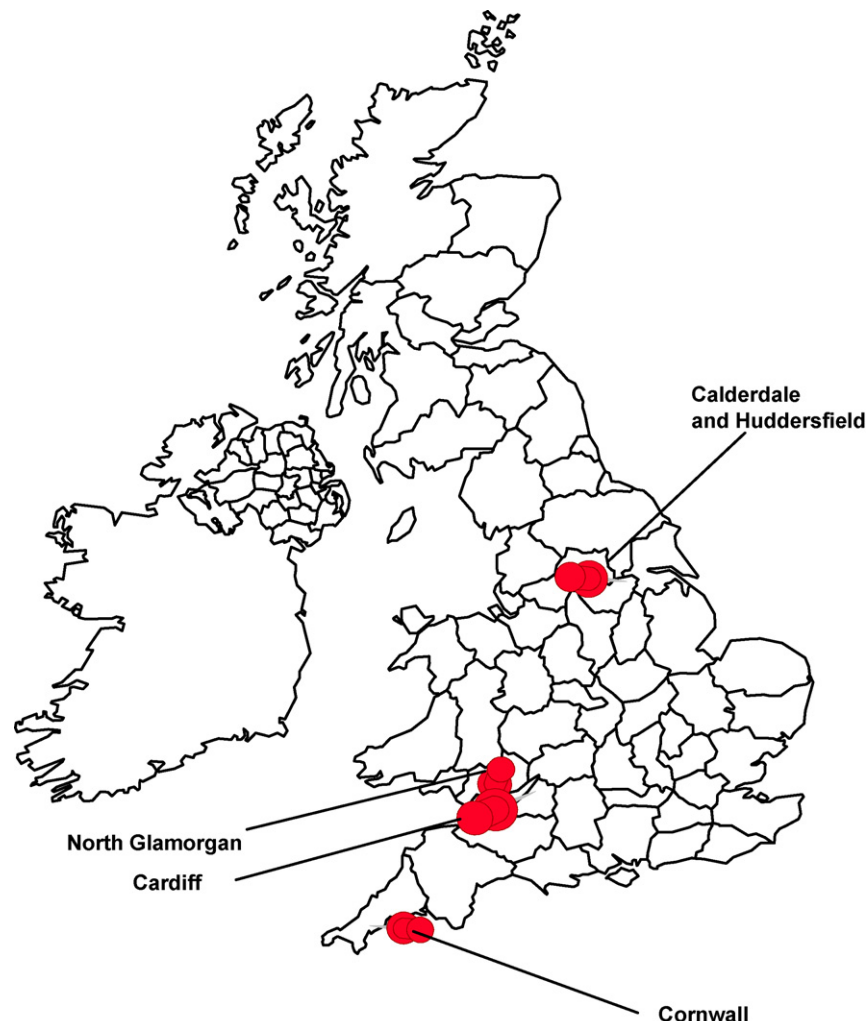

Fig. 1. Map of England and Wales showing the geographical location of the NHS Trusts surveyed.