

Guidance: Heat Management on Wards

Managing heat on wards is crucial to ensuring the comfort and wellbeing of patients and staff, particularly during warmer periods. Here are key strategies to effectively manage heat:

1. Ensure all air conditioning (AC) units are set to cool mode and adjusted to a comfortable, low temperature suitable for patient comfort. For mobile units, check that exhaust tubing is securely attached and directed out of windows to prevent recirculating warm air back into the room. It's essential to keep windows closed when AC units are in use to maximise their efficiency. It takes time for AC to cool the environment, so units should be switched on early in the day to maintain a comfortable temperature.
2. During cooler periods, such as at night, consider opening windows to allow fresh, cooler air to circulate and naturally cool the room. Conversely, during the day, keep windows and double glazing closed and draw curtains or blinds to block out direct sunlight and reduce room temperatures. Use fans to improve air circulation, directing airflow towards patients without causing direct drafts.
3. Hydration is paramount. Ensure patients are offered drinks every one to two hours during the day, in accordance with their care plan and meal mat, and encourage them to stay hydrated. Patients with an enteral tube should receive an additional 500ml of water every 12 hours, dependent on clinical assessment. Patients identified as high risk should be referred to the dietetics team and discussed with the responsible medical team.
4. Patients should wear light, breathable clothing and use lightweight bedding to aid in keeping cool.
5. Monitor patients closely for signs of heat-related illnesses, including dizziness, confusion, excessive sweating, or dark urine. Take immediate steps to cool down patients showing symptoms, inform the responsible registered nurses, and seek medical assistance as necessary.
6. Regularly monitor room temperatures. If any room temperature exceeds 26°C, take immediate action by adjusting AC settings or promptly reporting issues to estates through CAFM.
7. Turn off non-essential heat-generating equipment and lighting to minimise additional heat in the environment.
8. Maintain clear communication and coordination among staff regarding room temperatures and patient comfort. Work closely with estates, facilities, and administrative staff to promptly address any issues that arise.

Staff Wellbeing

Staff should also take steps to stay hydrated and cool. Make sure you have access to fresh water and take regular short breaks in a cool area. Look out for each other and report any signs of heat discomfort immediately. By taking these precautions, we can ensure a comfortable and safe environment for everyone. By implementing these strategies, ward staff can effectively manage heat levels and create a comfortable environment conducive to patient and staff wellbeing.