

Written evidence submitted by Urology Trade Association (PW0040)

About the Urology Trade Association

The Urology Trade Association (UTA) was established in 2007 to represent manufacturers and suppliers of urology products. The association seeks to:

- promote and sustain patient choice in access to continence products;
- increase patient and public awareness about continence issues; and
- ensure that patients are not placed at adverse risk by ill-advised policy decisions.

What measures should the UK Government take to reduce the production and disposal of single-use plastics in England? Are the measures announced so far, including a ban on certain single-use plastics and a plastic packaging tax, sufficient?

The UTA recognises the importance of tackling single-use plastics waste not only in its members' own manufacturing and waste streams, but also in the NHS, which is increasingly encouraged by government to reduce the amount of unnecessary single-use plastics flowing through the healthcare system. Our members work closely with the NHS and procurement managers in the search for solutions and have taken a number of actions to reduce single-use plastic waste.

We generally support the government's measures to tackle single-use plastics waste. However, our main concern lies in ensuring that government measures to reduce the production of single-use plastics in particular do not place patients who rely on medical devices at adverse risk. For reasons outlined below, we believe that there are certain products in the health care space where there is no safe alternative to using a single-use plastic product. We therefore strongly believe that the government should not look to reduce the production of these products in the search for sustainable alternatives, through an extension of a ban or otherwise.

How should alternatives to plastic consumption be identified and supported, without resorting to more environmentally damaging options?

Whilst our intentions are to reduce the environmental impact of our activities, products and services by looking for opportunities to reduce and recycle plastic, we believe that there are some instances where there are no real alternatives and where single-use products must remain the gold-standard in order to protect the safety of patients and reduce the burden on NHS acute care. This position is supported by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), which [states](#) that the re-use of products intended for single-use only can expose patients to "unnecessary risk".

For example, although a reusable catheter may be considered less environmentally damaging than a single-use catheter, re-using a catheter that has been sterilised by hand is likely to be a dangerous move which puts patients at risk. There is a risk that a return to reusable catheters and sterilisation techniques may increase the rate of urinary tract infections (UTIs) in the UK. In 2016/17 (the last year in which these figures were available) the unplanned admissions for UTIs cost the NHS £530 million per year. Pre-Covid,

UTI's were the largest cause of unplanned admissions into the NHS. They also put vulnerable patients at risk of further health complications, including renal failure and death.

Will the UK Government be able to achieve its shorter-term ambition of working towards all plastic packaging placed on the market being recyclable, reusable or compostable by 2025?

We hope that the government is able to achieve this shorter-term ambition and we recognise our responsibility in our manufacturing streams to reduce plastic packaging and improve recyclable options. For example, large parts of the product packaging and outer shell of the catheters our members manufacture and supply are in many cases recyclable. More information on the steps our members have taken to reduce their carbon footprint can be found [here](#).

September 2021