INFECTIONOUS WASTE MANAGEMENT IN BHUTAN: AN ANALYSIS OF POLICY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

All waste generated by health facilities is not hazardous; typically only 10% to 25% of the total healthcare waste is hazardous. Infectious waste is one category of hazardous waste that requires special handling and treatment to make it safe for disposal because of inherent pathogenic microorganisms that have the potential to transmit infections and cause injuries.

The study reported in this thesis examines the policies and practices of hospital infectious waste management in the Kingdom of Bhutan. This study is pioneering as it is a “whole of system” study on a national level. To identify the nature of problems and present possible solutions, conceptual model was used as a framework to explore policy practice gaps. A mixed-method research design using a range of data collection techniques, including official documents, in-depth interviews, survey questionnaires, focus group interviews and observations of waste management practices was employed. Participants in the study included policy makers and managers from the Ministry of Health and health facilities, heads of health training institutions, members of Infection Control and Healthcare Waste Management Committees, health professionals (doctors and nurses) from the 11 selected hospitals, and hospital cleaners of the National Referral Hospital.

The study revealed inadequacies in policy frameworks, rules and regulations, policy and practice expertise, occupational health and safety standards, infrastructure for waste management in the design of health facilities, training for health professionals and hospital cleaners, availability of personal protective equipment, and monitoring and supervision of practice. Breaches in practice related to segregation, handling, treatment, transportation and disposal of waste were identified.

The integration of findings from the mixed-method research study has identified areas for policy improvement for hospital infectious waste management and the implementation of these policies is recommended to promote and strengthen safe infectious waste management in Bhutan.