

# Where have all the flowers gone?

**Flowers don't need to be banned from patients' rooms!**

Floral arrangements light up the often depressing atmosphere in any patient room. But many hospitals have been concerned that flowers pose a hygiene risk. That was before the introduction of ecoVaas, an innovative, new vase system. Now, no patient need be without the colourful, get-well greetings from family and friends. Denise Hennig – D4 Health – spoke to Katrin Nolte, Infection Control Nurse at Spaarne Hospital Hoofddorp, The Netherlands. Opened in 2005, the 440 bed unit is equipped with six ecoVaas wall dispensers.

by Denise Hennig

**D4** *Flowers are a very important aspect for the patients' well-being in a hospital. How can we satisfy the hygiene requirements in patients' rooms when vases are considered a major pathogen carrier? What is your experience with the ecoVaas system, from the point of view of hygiene?*

**Katrin Nolte:** Healthcare professionals in the Netherlands are extremely concerned about infections caused by flowers, especially since the water in flower vases is the source of many pathogens. There are a few hospitals in Holland where I know flowers are actually prohibited. That is unbelievable because flowers are important for both the well-being of the patients and to make the rooms more pleasant. We decided to allow flowers but have developed special guidelines for their use.

**D4** *Could you tell us about those guidelines?*

**Katrin Nolte:** We have only ecoVaas vases – glass vases are off-limits in the entire hospital. There are several reasons for this decision: We don't want to be stuck with cleaning the vases, there is no space for storage on the ward and the main issue is that glass vases are major germ carriers. Furthermore, we want only visitors and volunteers to handle the flowers. Neither patients nor nursing staff are allowed to

handle them because we want to prevent the germ transmission, between water from flowers and nurses and patients. We have a special table where the flowers can be prepared by visitors. After the visitor has arranged the flowers he is required to wash his hands. All these directions for visitors are posted next to the flower table. The patient may have the flowers in his room for one week, after that the visitors or volunteers are asked to discard them. Of course flowers are not allowed in the ICU or in special care units.

**D4** *How did the visitors react? Do they accept these 'rules'?*

**Katrin Nolte:** At first the visitors were a bit surprised that they have to take care of the vases themselves. Normally they just buy the flowers and the nurse handles the vase. But after we explained why we have to do it this way, the ecoVaas system has now been fully accepted. The visitors like to do something for their relatives and it saves staff time as well as money. Moreover, the vase has a nice design and brings a bit more colour to the patient's room. The ecoVaas system is a big benefit to our hospital and our guidelines mean the patients don't have to be without their bouquets.



**info**  
**ECOVAAS**

*ecoVaas is a flower vase dispensing machine. The vase itself is made of recyclable and chlorine-free bleached paper which can be discarded after three weeks use. The vases come in different sizes, shapes and designs.*

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