

## SHORT COMMUNICATION

### CHALLENGES IN HEALTHCARE WASTE MANAGEMENT

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#### ABSTRACT

Healthcare waste is an inevitable product of healthcare services. If untreated, it has the potential to cause bio-chemical hazards. The recent COVID-19 pandemic, a global emergency, has increased the challenges of healthcare waste management. There was increased personal protective equipment waste like face masks, gloves, and aprons. The infectious waste was spread over hospitals, healthcare facilities, and quarantined homes. The segregation practices are compromised, and with greater use of disposables, there is a multifold increase in the quantum of biomedical waste. Despite regulations on biomedical waste over two decades, the implementation remains a big challenge. Barring major institutions in urban areas, biomedical waste is discarded in municipal wastes thrown on the roads, parks, and water bodies, leading to the choking of the drainage system, where the issue of poor packaging, labeling, and barcoding remains to be supervised. Poor reporting of accidents and needle stick injuries leads to increased risk of HIV and hepatitis. Pre-treatment facilities for infectious waste from laboratories remain a dream to be fulfilled. Even the best institutions in the country must develop biomedical waste storage sites. Waste is still stored in semi-permanent structures with poor facilities for cleaning and washing. An unprecedented increase in immunization waste leads to a disposal challenge in rural areas. The liquid waste remains connected to effluent treatment plants as most healthcare institutions still lack functional ETPs and STPs. Untreated waste is discharged in drains going to water bodies (rivers/ponds). Bio-medical waste records are poorly maintained, and many healthcare institutions don't send reports to the regulatory bodies. Lack of knowledge and communication among persons working in healthcare waste, lack of motivation, training, awareness, and cost factors are some of the problems faced in properly managing healthcare waste. Until we carry out proper surveys of waste management procedures, an effective communication strategy, and awareness campaigns, departmental heads, and nodal officers will be responsible for appropriate training and management of healthcare waste. Zero tolerance in implementing biomedical waste management will remain a distant dream.

**Keywords:** Challenges, healthcare, waste management.