Patients have lost so much confidence in managers’ ability to keep wards clean that they are bringing in their own cleaning products in the hope of avoiding healthcare-associated infections (HCAIs). Nurses argue that this could have the opposite effect and increase the spread of infection, because some chemicals neutralise the effects of cleaning products already used.

Staff at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth alerted their MP Alison Seabeck after some patients began bringing in products such as gels to wash their hands and wipes to clean the furniture. Ms Seabeck raised the issue in Parliament and health minister Jane Kennedy said in a written response: ‘Healthcare workers are trained in the use of personal protective equipment and in the performance of clinical procedures to minimise the risk of infection. Consequently, these products are unnecessary and patients do not need to take their own into hospital.’

RCN infection control expert Sue Wiseman said she understood the patients’ concerns, but believed they are over-reacting because of the current publicity given to methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA). ‘These cleaning items can be expensive, but we do not know what is in them or whether they are effective.’

A Derriford Hospital spokesperson said: ‘While we welcome anything that raises awareness about MRSA, the concerns that nurses raised were based on the fact that we are not aware the products have been validated for use in the clinical areas of the hospital.’

Nursing Standard