As nursing students at the University of South Wales, we were tasked with identifying an area of clinical practice for improvement. A look at the statistics made it clear that the hydration of patients urgently needed improvement.

How to track fluid intake

We knew it was important to remember that some people have fluids restricted for clinical reasons. But how do nurses know whether patients are sticking to their restrictions if fluid balance charts are not being completed accurately? We decided to look at what was happening clinically.

Staff only know if someone is on a fluid balance chart or fluid restriction if they read their handover sheet or there is a board indicating this above the patient’s bed. We were unsure if this was clear enough and created an online poll with the question: can you be confident that you know which of your patients need their fluid recorded or restricted during a shift?

The results were shocking – only 24% of the 405 nursing students, healthcare support workers and nurses who took part were confident that they knew. More than three quarters could not quickly and accurately identify which patients were at risk of dehydration or on a fluid balance chart, without checking the paperwork.

A visual clue

We decided that a yellow jug lid – which would be cost-effective and simple to install – could be used as a clear visual indicator. We chose yellow as it is a colour often used for aids for people with dementia or visual impairment.

We contacted the manufacturers of the hospitals’ existing water jugs. They created lids for us to use in the trial at the Royal Glamorgan Hospital, free of charge.

In a poll of 108 people at the hospital, including nurses, doctors, healthcare support workers and relatives, 96% said the yellow lids would help patients on the wards meet hydration needs.

A second, larger survey drew responses from 607 healthcare professionals. We asked them: If there were yellow lids on the jugs of patients who were on a fluid balance chart or fluid restriction, would you be able to safely, quickly and accurately identify them without looking at handover sheets or notes? Again the response was overwhelmingly positive.
We felt a huge sense of achievement when Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, which provides primary, community, hospital and mental health services, became the first health board in Wales to fund yellow lids for every one of its hospitals and care homes. The lids came into use in March and the initiative will reach almost 600,000 people.

Social media proved vital in spreading the word. In ten days we reached 156,000 people on Facebook and we also created a Twitter account to gain attention, and followed some of the most influential people in healthcare.

Team Hydr8 also featured on BBC Wales evening news and on BBC Radio Wales, as well as being the top feature on the BBC interactive red button on International Nurses Day. Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust contacted us via Twitter. They have bought yellow lids and are currently trying them out. The results so far are positive, with hydration levels rising by 400%.

Drive to change practice Southampton General Hospital has also purchased 200 lids to begin a trial and we have been approached by Jersey General Hospital. We are proud that our efforts have been recognised nationally and internationally. We were finalists in the student category of the 2019 RCNi Nurse Awards, and have had our project discussed at conferences as far afield as Canada and the US. We are all qualified now but will carry on as Team Hydr8 until the colour yellow is identifiable throughout the UK for hydration.

We want to ensure we inspire the next wave of students. Our initiative is presented to hundreds of students in Sheffield every term, and we have gone back to the university to speak to other cohorts, explaining to them that if you have an idea and are passionate about it you can make a difference. We are proud to have created an energy and excitement that has inspired others and a change in practice that will save lives.

Donna Walker is an emergency department nurse at the Royal Glamorgan Hospital

Find out more Team Hydr8 on Twitter #PutALidOnIt #CheckYourJugs @NhsHydr8