

GPs

WHAT CAN GENERAL PRACTITIONERS DO TO IMPROVE HEALTH, SAVE MONEY AND RESOURCES, AND REDUCE CARBON POLLUTION?

1

Understand the basic facts:

- Sustainability is not just about carbon reduction. It is a recognition that health and well-being is determined by many varied factors. Sustainability is about delivering high quality care within economic, social and environmental limits.
- The current 'curative' paradigm of care delivery medicalises patients and diminishes individual responsibility for health. A sustainable health service will focus on upstream and preventative interventions to promote health.
- The Climate Change Act 2008 sets legally binding targets for the UK to take action to reduce carbon dioxide equivalent emissions by 80% by 2050. The NHS has an interim target of a 10% reduction by 2015.
- According to the respected medical journal, The Lancet, climate change is "the biggest global health threat of the 21st century". Our business is health and we have a moral duty to act on health threats, to manage long-term strategic risk and to mitigate future demand on the health service.

2

Move and Communicate better:

- Improve efficiency, access to services and empower patients and public by offering services using appropriate technology: telephone video and web conference between staff: staff, patients: staff, patient: patient).
- Ensure the practice is easily accessible via public transport.
- Communicate and model good travel, walking, cycling and public transport when ever possible – A key factor in shifting behaviours around tobacco usage was when doctors started giving up smoking.
- If you are considering admitting a patient, check whether they can be managed in the community. Care closer to home saves carbon and is often better for patient's health and well-being.

3

Eat and Drink better

- Educate patients and the public about the health benefits of a locally sourced, seasonal diet which is high in fruit and vegetables and contains less red meat and processed foods.
- Encouraging the use of local produce can lead to a self-reinforcing cycle – using local produce provides employment and money in the local economy, which in turn improves quality of life and standards of living that improves the health and well-being of the population who make healthier and more informed lifestyle choices.



4

Buy, procure, commission, use better

- Sustainability and carbon reduction is essentially excellence in business management. You can reduce your practice oncosts by reducing energy consumption, increasing recycling and making business processes more efficient and lean.
- Take action to limit the impact (financial and environmental) of prescribing decisions by encouraging patients to take a full course of treatment, educating patients about stockpiling medications and regularly reviewing the usage of repeat prescriptions. The largest part of the NHS carbon footprint is from the manufacture of pharmaceuticals and a large percentage of community prescribed medicines end up in land fill.
- Use the practice buying power responsibly – Include statements on carbon reduction and sustainability in contracts and tendering processes.
- Does your patient really need that test? Over-investigation, applying the wrong test or not choosing the most efficient test wastes resources. Think twice. Not only will you avoid the risks associated with the test but you will have saved resources.

5

Develop better models of care

- Work with secondary care colleagues and GP commissioning consortia to develop a whole systems approach with a seamless integration between secondary and primary care.
- Improve safety and patient experience by making the default setting for prevention, diagnosis, cure and care as close to home as possible.
- Reduce duplication and waste by simplifying and integrating systems and services (for diseases, for risk factors, for life stages - from diabetes to dignified dying)

For further assistance please visit:

[The Royal College of General Practitioners website - www.rcgp.org.uk](http://www.rcgp.org.uk)

[The NHS Sustainable Development Unit website - www.sdu.nhs.uk](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk)

[The Productive General Practice website - Productive General Practice is a new programme from the NHS Institute which aims to support general practices in realising internal efficiencies, while maintaining quality of care and releasing time to spend on more value added activities. www.institute.nhs.uk/productive_general_practice/general/productive_general_practice.html](http://www.institute.nhs.uk/productive_general_practice/general/productive_general_practice.html)

What is "5 to Survive"?

"5 to survive and prosper" is an initiative from the NHS Sustainable Development Unit (SDU). It aims to help different NHS professional groups to understand the role-specific opportunities, responsibilities and actions that they as a group need to take to ensure the resilience and sustainability of the health system.

Why now?

Sustainability has entered the business consciousness as a serious and pressing issue and therefore the regulatory requirements for organisations to demonstrate they are taking action are ramping up. The risks posed to the health system by constantly increasing demand, budgetary constraints, global resource uncertainty and a changing climate means that organisations that fail to manage these risks will quickly become unfit for purpose.

Who is responsible for this?

The position of GPs as the gatekeepers of the secondary care setting means you have a unique opportunity to protect people from the health service by promoting healthy lifestyles and reducing the material impact of delivering care. Sustainability is an issue that impacts on the lives of everyone and it is therefore the responsibility of all health care professionals to take action. All health care staff have a key role in ensuring that resources are used efficiently, the carbon footprint of the health sector is reduced and health services continue to improve.

The "5 to Survive for GPs" were put together by the NHS SDU in association with the Royal College of General Practitioners