

Green Impact in GP surgeries

Green Impact is a change and engagement programme, providing a framework of pro-sustainability actions to help people understand sustainability and social responsibility and take steps to make a difference. The NUS, the University of Bristol and several Bristol-based GPs used Green Impact to engage GP surgeries and medicine students in sustainability and social responsibility.

University of Bristol,
RCGP and NUS

Behaviour change



What was the issue being addressed?

Sustainability and healthcare are inextricably linked: the NHS contributes 3% of the UK's annual carbon footprint, and also has to treat the illnesses and diseases arising from the effects of climate change. Improving is difficult, often due to a lack of knowledge or a belief that the problem is too large to be solved. There are an estimated 10,000 GP surgeries and 340,000 students studying medicine, dentistry or subjects allied to medicine across the UK. Educating and engaging healthcare staff, both current and future, can improve the impacts of the NHS and provide role models of good practice for patients and the wider community.

What action was taken to overcome the issue?

GPs, trainee GPs and sustainability professionals formed the Green Impact for Health (GIFH) Board.

They developed a toolkit of straightforward actions for staff in GP surgeries to complete to improve their surgeries' sustainability and efficiency. Board members and second year medical students at the University of Bristol studying Sustainable Healthcare made suggestions to be included (e.g. switching off unnecessary lights and equipment; reviewing patients' prescriptions regularly to reduce wastage), which were listed and categorised. This list was scored independently by each member of the Board based on ease of implementation and impact. The 100 highest scoring actions were included in the toolkit at www.greenimpact.org.uk/giforhealth.

Practices had eight weeks to complete as many of the actions as they could, with NUS providing support, in order to win awards. Surveys at the beginning and end evaluated staff opinions of sustainability and GIFH.

Six practices submitted their toolkits for review. Members of the Board assessed the submissions by reviewing the toolkits and speaking to or visiting the practices. At the RCGP Severn Deanery annual Gala Dinner and

What was the impact?

Three practices achieved a bronze standard level and three received the Pathfinder Practice status, rewarding their efforts. Horfield Health Centre and The Bradford on Avon & Melksham Health Partnership were jointly awarded the Overall Winner award for their particularly impressive work. Altogether, the practices completed 252 actions.

It's estimated that just two of the actions included in the toolkit (encouraging staff to switch off lights and equipment when not in use and print double-sided) could save up to £1000 and almost 4 tonnes of carbon per practice over a year .

“There is a gap between thinking globally and acting locally, and this helps people do something.”

Dr Terry Kemple, RCGP President, Board member and Green Impact participant at Horfield Health Centre

The survey results demonstrate the beginnings of staff attitudinal and behavioural shift. The number of staff who fitted in the less positive 'Cautious Participants' and 'Sideline Supporters' categories decreased and the number in the more positively sustainable 'Concerned Consumers' category increased . There were also more reported sustainable behaviours including reductions in the number of people who:

- 'Often' or 'always' leave their laptop or PC on standby;
- 'Never' print double-sided;
- 'Never' think about where food they buy comes from.

Lessons learned / success factors?

Successes:

- Including the intended audience in design ensured that we covered the correct issues in the correct way;
- Focussing on improving quality and patient care and reducing waste, instead of energy and carbon savings, caught people's attention;
- Having the right people on board ensured we were all dedicated to our goal and passionate about what we were doing;

Lessons:

- One practice found that switching on reception's electric heater doubled the energy usage of the whole practice – a useful fact others can understand and relate to;
- In future the toolkit will be open for longer, while also avoiding clashing with other deadlines;
- Often it is simply a challenge to get the right person to lead a practice team, especially because there often isn't an obvious job role associated with sustainable healthcare.

Scaling up

If all 10,000 GP surgeries in the UK switched off lights and equipment and printed double-sided, they could save an estimated £8 million+ and 31,000 tonnes of carbon annually. Their staff could be learning about how to make their workplace more efficient and less wasteful, also impacting upon their patients and encouraging them to live more sustainably. The Royal College of GPs has now confirmed that they will be supporting the national roll-out of the scheme, launching in October 2016

Get involved

www.greenimpact.org.uk/giforhealth

nus

green impact

www.sduhealth.org.uk/casestudies