

JUNIOR DOCTORS

WHAT CAN JUNIOR DOCTORS 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 about delivering high quality care within economic, social and environmental limits.
- The actions we take now in relation to climate change will have a good impact on health in the future and the safety of the users of services.
- Health care professionals have a responsibility to promote improvements in health not only in the short term but in the longer term
- The Climate Change Act 2008 legally obliges NHS organisations 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.

2

Move and Communicate better:

- Promote patient safety and efficiency and empower patients and public by offering services using appropriate technology: telephone video and web conference between staff: staff, patients: staff, patient: patient
- Communicate and model good travel, walking, cycling and public transport when ever possible.
- Consider remote work arrangements using teleconferencing or on-line resources for training. As well as saving carbon this may also improve your quality of life through reducing your travel time.
- Ask your Deanery to devise a sustainable placement policy which aims to minimise your travel whilst maximising your training opportunities.
- Ask your medical staffing department to develop rotas that allow you to use public transport and minimise travel. Travel associated with the NHS accounts for 17% of NHS emissions

3

Eat and Drink better

- Good nutrition is critical for patients' general health, post-operative recovery, length of hospital stay and experience of the health service. Work with your colleagues and the catering department to promote the case for providing healthy meals using more locally sourced fruit and vegetables, less red meat and processed foods.
- Save the NHS money by promoting the use of tap water rather than bottled water where clinically appropriate.
- Educate patients 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.

4

Buy, procure, commission, use better

- 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 carbon.
- Most of the NHS carbon footprint comes from procurement (59%) which includes medicines.
- Do you really need to prescribe the drug? Ask yourself, will the patient really benefit from this drug? Is there a way to give the drug that minimises consumption of resources such as an oral preparation rather than via the intravenous route?
- Regularly review your patients current medication and whether they are actually taking it.
- Planning for early discharge not only has direct health benefits but saves carbon.
- Ask your supplies department to provide recycled products where available and clinically appropriate.

5

Develop better models of care

- Primary prevention not only produces health gains for your patients but will result in a reduction in future healthcare consumption that will save carbon. So encourage healthy lifestyles. Advise your patients to stop smoking, drink less alcohol and eat more fruit and vegetables. Promote exercise.
- Reduce duplication and waste by simplifying and integrating systems and services (for diseases, for risk factors, for life stages - from diabetes to dignified dying)
- Improve safety and convenience by making the default place for prevention, diagnosis, cure and care as close to home as possible.
- 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 a patient's health and well-being. Can the treatment or care be provided as an outpatient or day-case?

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. However, organisations with the foresight to address future risks now are positioning themselves well.

Who is responsible for this?

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. As a junior doctor you are a medical leader of the future. You are well placed to be a practical role model of sustainability to help achieve the NHS target of 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050. Changing medical culture to a sustainable one early in your career will provide ongoing gains in both carbon saving and improving health.