CPDmatch

A single point of online access to find education related to climate and the environment

Topic Area(s)

* Education and workforce;

Please specify your project approach

Both adaptation and mitigation

Key message / aim

Our own health is dependent upon the health of the environment which is under threat from the climate, pollution and nature emergency. Healthcare professionals are in a unique position to use their trusted voices and inspire others to act. They must however be climate and environmentally literate, undertaking education which gives them confidence to communicate clearly.

What was the problem?

The climate and environmental emergency is a health emergency, will increase demand on healthcare systems which, as we saw with Covid, will become increasingly vulnerable. Healthcare professionals have a duty to not only reduce their own impact but to communicate clearly and inspire others to act.

An Ipsos MORI survey commissioned by the Health Foundation in 2021 found that only 27% of NHS staff were aware of the NHS's net zero ambition. This was not only a concern from the perspective of internal engagement but a lost opportunity to utilise the trusted voice of healthcare professionals.

Since co-founding Healthcare Ocean (another not-for-profit organisation) in October 2020, I have given over 90 conference presentations and at most of these, I ask if anyone in the audience has ever visited the Scripps Institution of Oceanography's website and looked at The Keeling Curve showing atmospheric CO2. To date, out of the 1000s of people who I have presented to, no healthcare professional has ever raised their hand.

We conserve only what we love; we love only what we understand and we understand only what we are taught. Education is key to drive change but for education to be effective, it must first be found. At the time of developing CPDmatch, there was no website which was acting as an aggregator site for climate and environmental education.

What was the solution?

The solution was to create a website where climate and environmental Continuing Professional Development (CPD) was aggregated so all healthcare professionals could find courses, conferences, webinars, study days and articles to improve their level of literacy.

I therefore created CPDmatch, a not-for-profit environmental and social enterprise which provides this website for organisations to advertise climate and environmental education for healthcare professions to find and undertake. CPDmatch also accommodates wider education relating to healthcare as high-quality care is sustainable care. Since April 2021, we've seen visitors from over 150 countries; clear proof the platform works on a global scale.

We encourage users to reduce their own environmental impact by helping them find local and virtual events and we automatically send notifications when new education and resources of interest are listed; that's the match in CPDmatch. We're also the world's first healthcare education platform to concurrently accommodate publications and articles; a great source of easily accessible, sustainable, and often free CPD.

Development was a collaboration between myself, my wife, a friends and Framework, a software agency based in Nottingham. We started developing in 2019, launched early 2020 and re-launched April 2021 post Covid. Due to the turbulence of covid and challenges I detail below, the site has cost in excess of £120,000 to create and run. I cover funding in answer 7.

What were the challenges?

Firstly, securing the funding to create a site which worked. From the outset, I wanted this site to be globally relevant and accessible to all. I did not want this focused on creating profit but on the ethos at all times. I therefore needed to self-fund plus seek support from various organisations such as Health Education England, Health Innovation Network and match funding. Almost half of the funding however came from my own NHS income.

Secondly, I had no experience for such a project and although I sought help from many organisations including the Regional Tech Centre, Innovate UK, the AHSNs and Clinical Entrepreneurs Programme, I found myself largely making decisions on my own and making mistakes. These mistakes led us down the wrong path several times especially from a development perspective.

Thirdly, the software developer created a good product but it was never built with Google and Search Engine Optimisation in mind. We are now therefore retrospectively engineering site build and content so we can become a well-respected website in the eyes of Google. This is a slow process but we're now on the SEO journey.

Finally, we are trying to reach millions of healthcare professionals on a very limited budget for marketing whether this is through SEO or direct. We therefore need all the help we can get including case studies to secure the traffic we need. Traffic not only means we are driving change but also ensures Google trusts as a a website to direct people toward.

Engagement was secured through endlessly communicating with all stakeholders - funders, employing organisations, education providers and site users.

What helped the intervention implementation/success?

Determination, collaboration, support from regional organisations such as Health Education England, the Health Innovation Network and family who have supported throughout.

The generosity of specifically those with NHS England and the AHSN (now HINE) was key as this was very expensive to develop.

What were the results/Impact?

Patient outcomes:

Whilst CPDmatch accommodates healthcare CPD, we cannot directly link the activities undertaken by healthcare professionals and therefore patient outcomes to our resources.

What we do know however is that for high quality care to be delivered, healthcare professionals must be up-to-date.

The feedback we've had from healthcare professional user surveys is positive so I can only hope we are having an impact.

Population outcomes:

As patient outcomes.

Environmental impact:

We have not yet measured whether our users have reduced their travel as a result of using CPDmatch which helps them find local and virtual education. This will be a task for the future as it will be really useful to know. However, I am hoping that the content we advertise has improved all site users make changes at home and at work to reduce their own impact on the environment.

Social impact:

In addition to traditional education, we have also permitted the advertising of events such as beach cleans and workshops. We do this because all these events are educational in some form plus, they encourage physical activity and improve wellbeing.

Financial impacts:

This analysis would need to follow a wider assessment of healthcare professional behavior following use of CPDmatch. We examine whether event organisers gain more attendees which may improve their own revenue flow or whether environmentally literate healthcare professionals travel less because of their use of CPDmatch.

As for our own financial data, our accounts are submitted annually as required. We are a not-for-profit organisation whose balance sheet fluxes around zero at all times and we use any secured income for site maintenance, development and company overheads.

What were the learning points?

The healthcare profession is a trusted voice and can hopefully, as we saw during Covid, can drive widespread behavioral change. This can happen again for climate and the environment but we must urgently improve literacy.

 Creating a single point of online access to climate and environmental education makes sense and has potential to improve literacy across this and other key professional groups, supplier industries and the public.

Marketing is difficult and Search Engine Optimisation critical to success. We now understand how to ensure Google trusts us but need multiple trusted back links into from websites and case studies.

Success so far has been achieved because everyone we talk to recognise the need. This ensures that we have received support at the appropriate times.

Advice to others would be to keep the first proof-of-concept simple and build slowly. We were too ambitious and complicated to begin with which hampered progress. We spent alot of time fixing the site rather than marketing its existence.

Next steps

1. Continue to find trusted partners in order to have the necessary funds to continue developing the site. For example, our homepage needs an urgent redesign to communicate clearly what we are aiming to achieve.
2. We need to ensure that our education providers continue to list their events but also, we have team capacity to curate adverts which signpost to content. CPDmatch needs to always be useful to the visitors which not only fulfills its primary goal but also proves to Google that we are the right site to display in search results.
3. We need to create blog/post content to supplement external education and articles. This will be created by site supporters who have specific expertise in subject areas.
4. We need to be advertised as widely as possible through all channels including forums as case studies, other websites, through social media and within employing organisations.
5. The site must signpost to resources which are useful to all in the healthcare value chain, supplier industries and the public. The narrative of health in the content of the climate and environmental emergency has the potential to drive global change.

Feedback

We post feedback as testimonials on our homepage (scroll to the bottom): <https://cpdmatch.co.uk/>

Want to know more?

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Partner organisations involved: Please see our About page: <https://cpdmatch.co.uk/about-us> for a full list.

Has this case study or story been made public in any form before?Yes

The story behind CPDmatch was published here: <https://cpdmatch.co.uk/resources>

Resources and Refereces

The website is: <https://cpdmatch.co.uk/> which is where testimonials can be found.

Present site supporters: <https://cpdmatch.co.uk/about-us>

My personal LinkedIn profile, on which I talk about all my sustainability work (e.g., Healthcare Ocean) including CPDmatch is: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/richardhixson/>

Twitter profile is: <https://x.com/CPDmatch>