

In launching this policy, we invited two ACD Fellows, Dr Fiona Bruce and Dr Belinda Welsh, to share the steps they have taken in their own practices and workplaces to reduce their environmental footprint.



DR FIONA BRUCE, VIC FACULTY

As I work in my practice and hospital clinics, I am conscious of the waste and carbon emissions generated through dermatology practice.

I have looked for ways to make changes, particularly with respect to energy use. The energy used to heat and cool the renovated 1950s house which is my solo practice is significant. I put new insulation in the roof, however the building has inadequate wall insulation which I have not been able to address. The frequent opening and closing of doors does not help. I have some double glazed windows and have installed plastic window film on some others to improve their energy performance.

Halogen downlights in the waiting area were very inefficient and have been replaced with LED downlights. The installation of a 5kW solar panel system in 2014, which cost \$7410, has proved to be very worthwhile financially. I have saved about \$1000 per year in electricity costs with this solar panel system. It also makes me feel good to see the panels and know I am generating renewable electricity every day. I still have gas hot water, however soon plan to move to electric hot water. I will then be able to disconnect from gas completely and rely on the electricity generated by my solar panels.

The [Ethical paper website](#) has been very helpful to source paper which is 100% post-consumer recycled, FSC certified and native forest free. Our old growth forests are precious and irreplaceable. Paper and cardboard are recycled in my practice. This is a fortnightly service. I am particular about separating items which are suitable for recycling. I find that staff need ongoing encouragement not to contaminate the recycling stream.

I have tried to minimise medical waste by sorting it carefully from items which do not need to go to medical waste. On contacting the company who disposes of the

medical waste, I was very pleased to find they had a 100kW 50 panel solar array.

When I look at dressing packs, I am conscious of all the single use plastic. Currently we seem to have little option in terms of alternative packs with less plastic. I minimise using them for biopsies. I avoid samples for patients to minimise all those small plastic tubes and packets which will end up in landfill. Hopefully, the patients will try the product for a longer time if they buy a full-sized item!

In the future I would like to see more information on the carbon footprint of the medical supplies I use and the drugs I prescribe. As I recommend non soap washes and emollients I think of the plastic containers and packaging they come in and wish I had a better option to be recommending.

Although I have made these changes in my practice, I know that for our society to move to where we need to be to halt climate change and look after our environment, we need systemic change. Our collective voice to exert pressure on government and the health system as a whole is another way that we can really make a difference.

DR BELINDA WELSH, VIC FACULTY

I think medical practice can be very wasteful. I have tried to make a lot of small changes to reduce our environmental footprint.

After renting rooms for many years, I built a new practice from scratch in 2013. This meant I could incorporate energy efficient initiatives into the building. The building itself was designed with a high ceiling along the corridors to let in lots of natural light. We had lots of insulation, double glazed windows and LED panel lights throughout. We installed sensor lights in a number of rooms, energy efficient hand dryers in the toilets (although these are really loud) and dimmer switches to reduce the light brightness in the summer months. Getting the mechanical engineering

for the heating and cooling was a challenge as having lots of rooms meant each one needed its own split system. We make sure these are turned off when rooms are not in use. I considered getting a greywater system and solar hot water but it ended up putting me over budget. I'm sorry I didn't stretch a bit more for that now.

In 2014 I had 37 solar panels installed on the roof with two 5kW inverters. This cost \$14,000 at the time but I think it has been a good investment. Our electricity bill dropped dramatically representing a big ongoing saving – especially with two UVB machines and lasers running. As an example, my electricity bill for September to December 2013 was \$1792 and for the same period in 2017 was \$716.

We recycle cardboard, paper and soft plastics. We have tried hard to reduce our use of dressing packs – especially when doing smaller procedures like shave biopsies. I think these generate a huge amount of plastic waste. We also try to reduce the gowns we use for patients. Not everyone needs to change into a gown for a skin check.

A computerised practice doesn't equate to being paperless without some thought and effort. We try as much as possible to communicate electronically with patients. We try to email them information rather than give them sheets of paper for example regarding procedures, laser treatments, and aftercare which they seem to prefer. We now get consent from patients electronically via an iPad. If I need to give patients

instructions or a management plan (with their consent and a double check of their email address) I will email this to them through our medical software and it can be saved to their history.

Pre-COVID-19 we were all trying to use Keep Cups for our takeaway coffee and we need to get back into that habit now.

My most recent step has been the purchase of an electric car. I'm no car enthusiast but I got a Tesla

(Model 3) and I completely love it. I installed a charging station at work so I can charge it during the day using the solar panels.

There are so many ways we can try to be less wasteful. It just requires some mindful attention. The challenge is to get everyone in the practice to change their behaviour. We are motivated to keep trying and would encourage everyone to make whatever change they can. ●



2011

Dr Welsh's before and after of the rebuild of her Complete Skin Specialists practice.



2019



Dermatologists do more

College Fellows support the community in many different ways. In order to showcase the various ways Fellows provide support for different areas of the community, *The Mole* will feature a new series *Dermatologists Do More*. If you have something to share, please contact College.

To kick start the series, we are highlighting Dr Robert Rosen FACD, Consultant Dermatologist and Lieutenant Colonel with the Australian Defence Force, pictured here addressing the Anzac Day Dawn of Dawn Service at South Head in Sydney.