
Sustainable Healthcare

What it means & why it matters.

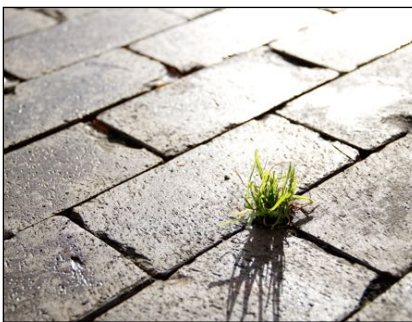
Dr Jonathan Rocks - August 2017



Introduction

Starting work as a GP trainee in my final year at Lyngford Park Surgery in Taunton, Somerset I had many goals for the year ahead. One such goal was the to learn more about sustainable healthcare and develop a project relating to this issue, this was part of a scholarship and one month extension in training that I had opportunity to take part in through the Severn School of Primary Care.

Through an introductory session at the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare in Oxford I was able to grasp a better understanding of what sustainable healthcare meant for primary care. I then spent several months reading around the topic, listening to talks and talking to those involved in the many aspects of sustainable healthcare. I discovered that one of the main aims is to reduce carbon consumption, thereby impacting positively on global warming which in turn will have a positive impact on population health. This aim can be addressed in many areas of work and life not just limited to the health care, but my scholarship was to find out what could be achieved in the primary care setting.



Green Impact For Health

During this time I became aware of a project called Green Impact for Health, started by the National Union of Students (NUS) it had then been implemented in primary care working alongside the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP). It consists of an online toolkit designed by GPs and sustainability professionals with a number of tasks aimed at improving the sustainability and environmental impact of the practice. In completing a certain number of tasks an award could be earned for the practice.

I discussed the possibility of using the Green Impact for Health online toolkit for Lyngford Park Surgery with the GP partners and practice manager and was given the green light. I then set about educating the staff within the practice about the project, either in face to face discussions or via email. I invited all members of staff to contribute to the

project and in total 15 members of staff signed up to the online toolkit. Staff members included GPs, nurses and receptionists amongst others.

It was encouraging to have so many take an interest in the project and as understanding about it grew then tasks quickly became accomplished. Many of the tasks, although ultimately contributing to improving the sustainability and environmental impact of the practice, also helped improve patient experience and treatment. Some tasks aimed to improve efficiency, others to cut down on waste or unnecessary use of resources. Different ideas for Quality Improvement Projects (QIP) were also suggested.

As a direct result of the project we learnt that a local pharmacy took part in an inhaler recycling scheme, that our recycling company was able to recycle much more than realised, our printer paper was sourced to meet environmental standards and that the company supplying the printer toner also offered a recycling programme.

Learning was also shared about motivational interviewing, social prescribing, career and personal resilience. These are just a few of the achievements that we accomplished helping to improve patient experience and care and also saving time, money and importantly reducing our carbon consumption and, therefore, impacting on climate change and population health. It really is a winner from every angle and due to all the effort from the staff we were able to achieve a Green Impact for Health Bronze Award which we have proudly displayed within the practice.

The project was not without its difficulties; despite initial staff interest this quickly waned, implementing change was difficult even for apparently the simplest things, this was a learning process in itself. The irony and challenge for project is that for it to be sustainable in itself requires someone at Lyngford Park Surgery to take the lead on it when I complete my training. However, overall it has been a rewarding experience and I feel more knowledgeable about sustainable healthcare and how this can and should be achieved within primary care.

