



Faculty of Public Health

of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

Response from the Faculty of Public Health to *Saving Carbon, Improving Health – A Draft Carbon Reduction Strategy for the NHS in England*

The UK Faculty of Public Health

The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) is the leading professional body for public health specialists in the UK. It aims to advance the health of the population through three key areas of work: health promotion, health protection and healthcare improvement. In addition to maintaining professional and educational standards for specialists in public health, FPH advocates on key public health issues and provides practical information and guidance for public health professionals.

Promoting sustainable development and action to tackle climate change within the health community is a primary focus for FPH. In January 2008 we published our practical guide to taking action on climate change, *Sustaining a Health Future*, which gathered strong support from across the healthcare community. A coalition of 19 organisations including the NHS Confederation, CABE, Local Government Association, the Sustainable Development Commission, and others called on the senior management of the NHS to prioritise action on climate change.

FPH very much welcomes the draft strategy from the newly formed NHS Sustainable Development Unit and strongly supports the underlying principles, overall framework and strategic objectives the Unit is proposing. We believe a sustainable development approach, including carbon reduction, should be given the highest priority within the NHS – and that its key elements should become compulsory.

Comments:

- In its guide, *Sustaining a Healthy Future*ⁱ, FPH argues that the NHS should act as leaders of change. It would therefore support the setting of more 'ambitious' targets for carbon reduction in the NHS (currently set at 60% reduction by 2050). The Mayor of London has set a carbon reduction target of 60% by 2025 for the whole of London. FPH also notes that the government is currently undertaking a review of the '60% by 2050' target in light of the overwhelming evidence that drastic action on reducing carbon is urgently needed if we are to avoid a temperature rise of two degrees. As one of the key organisations that will be required to deal with the consequences of climate change, the NHS should act as leaders of change and set more ambitious targets, including annual targets to monitor progress. FPH would also recommend the implementation of those strategies set out in *Sustaining a Health Future* – in particular measuring policies against our sustainability checklist.

ⁱ Available from www.fph.org.uk

- Tied into the point above, there needs to be a stronger discussion within the strategy on the health impacts of climate change. The strategy should also make explicit the links between action on climate change and improving public health (such as reducing obesity) as part of the 'case for action' by the NHS.
- The draft strategy appears, in the main, to focus on NHS trusts. It is not entirely clear whether primary care (such as GP surgeries, pharmacists etc) will be covered in more depth and detail by the final strategy. FPH would support the inclusion of primary care and would propose that, in time, any NHS organisation or supplier should have to meet the requirements set out in the strategy.
- The major barrier to action within the NHS is how to effectively change behaviour, particularly at the board and senior management levels; action on climate change is a low priority within corporate management. FPH strongly agrees that "a widespread and systematic culture of carbon awareness and carbon reduction" has to become the norm within the NHS. However, it is critical to have senior level sign-up in order to effect real and lasting change. FPH welcomes the proposal that each Trust should develop a comprehensive Board Carbon Management Strategy.
- Of critical importance will be to embed action on carbon reduction into the core business of the NHS. FPH very much welcomes the concept of 'carbon governance' proposed by the strategy. We believe this should be given the same level of regard as financial or clinical governance and that its inclusion in the performance assessment framework and the NHS operating framework should be mandatory. Consideration should also be given to including action on carbon reduction within the Quality and Outcome Framework or other element of the contract for GPs.
- FPH notes that an indicator on energy/carbon efficiency is included in the NHS 'Vital Signs' which primary care trusts will be 'encouraged' to choose. As stated above, FPH would argue that this should become a mandatory operational task.
- FPH welcomes the SDU's proposal to develop economic models to demonstrate the business case for taking action on climate change. This will be an important lever in engaging senior level sign-up to action and should clearly demonstrate the negative consequences of not taking action. We presume these models will include various financial and health scenarios. Models should also include information on the benefits of using telemedicine.
- Accountability will be an important element to ensuring delivery of the strategy. FPH welcomes the move by the Care Quality Commission to publish information on an NHS organisation's contribution to sustainable development. FPH would also argue that it becomes mandatory for all NHS Trusts to produce a Board Carbon Management Strategy and measures put in place to hold to account those NHS organisations which fail to produce such a strategy.
- Consideration should also be given to how we engage with patients and develop their role as advocates of change (eg. through patient forums). For example, CQC information on trusts' carbon emissions could be included in the indicator set provided to patients under the choice scheme.

- FPH welcomes the Purchasing and Supply Agency's commitment to mapping the supply chain to understand the ethical and environmental impacts within the entire system, from product to supply. This will be an important element to any NHS carbon reduction strategy. FPH believes the NHS should use its immense purchasing power to buy, wherever possible, local goods and services. Hospital food should comprise a greater proportion of non-meat meals which are less carbon-intensive. Work should also be undertaken to examine improving the quality and appeal of hospital food given that so many meals go uneaten by patients.
- FPH would strongly support the expansion of the Carbon Trust's programme which will be essential to supporting NHS Trusts in delivering reductions in carbon. We would like to see the programme extended to all NHS organisations, including GPs, pharmacies and health centres.
- FPH would also support further investment in the Energy Fund to help the NHS invest in energy efficient initiatives.
- Incentivising staff to walk, cycle or use modes of transport other than private car use is critical. The current car mileage allowance offers a perverse incentive to staff. We would strongly support the 20p per mile cycle mileage rate to encourage more people to cycle. Strategies to cut car usage such as car share schemes, tele- and video-conferencing should be quickly established.
- Sustainable development and carbon reduction need to be embedded in the culture of all NHS organisations and their suppliers. One means of achieving this is to include these elements in the education and training of all staff. Coordinators of training curricula and programmes and the bodies providing vocational and professional qualifications should be required to ensure that these elements are included at the appropriate level.
- Academic institutions linked to the NHS, including the royal colleges and faculties, should be encouraged to adopt similar principles and pursue similar approaches to carbon reduction not only in their educational, standard-setting and advocacy roles but also as organisations and employers in their own right.
- Primary Care Trusts are increasingly working in partnership at local level through Local Strategic Partnerships. Local government is also vigorously pursuing the carbon reduction agenda (and indeed in many ways is further ahead than the NHS in this regard). As well as inclusion in Local Area Agreements, ways should be sought to ensure that knowledge, skills and experience in carbon reduction are shared across the local economy.
- The NHS research agenda should include research to identify barriers to individual and organisational change regarding carbon reduction and ways of effectively overcoming those barriers.

The FPH would be happy to work in partnership with the SDU in taking this agenda forward. We are currently developing a follow-up programme to engage health and healthcare communities, building on the actions set out in our handbook, *Sustaining a Healthy Future*.