Ealing Borough Primary Care Team

# **How Ealing Borough Primary Care Team embedded sustainability in primary care**

# Topic Area

## **Please** **identify (more than one option may be selected)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Adaptation |  | Communications and engagement |  | Estates and facilities (energy, waste, water) |  | Food, catering  and nutrition |  |
| Funding and  financial mechanisms |  | Medicines |  | Research, innovation and offsetting |  | Strategic ambition |  |
| Supply chain and procurement |  | Sustainable  models of care |  | Travel and transport |  | Workforce, networks and system leadership |  |
| Green/blue space and biodiversity |  | Digital transformation |  | Sustainability education |  |  |  |
| Other (please specify): | | | | | | | |

\*Topics aligned with the 12 Greener NHS workstreams (NHS England) are shaded.

## 

**Key message/aim:**

The primary care team sees many of the health-related impacts due to climate change (including health inequalities) in their consulting rooms and anticipates the pressure they will be under to keep services running in extreme weather conditions. It is essential that GP practices reduce their environmental impact and incorporate sustainability into their daily work without imposing a considerable amount of additional work. We decided to inspire as many practices as possible to start making changes, in reducing their environmental impact and improving the health and well-being of their patient population - working towards becoming a ‘greener practice’ and sustainable healthcare.

## **What was the problem?**

GPs are well aware that a ‘climate emergency’ is a ‘health emergency’. However, many do not make the connection with clinical practice when it comes to taking action and many fail to realise that the majority of a general practice’s carbon footprint results from clinical activity. We have the perfect opportunity to engage with our community and raise awareness of the benefits and threats of climate change on our health. Around 90% of NHS patient contacts1 are via primary care.

The key is to acknowledge the considerable part we play in the problem of the climate crisis and how we can be the solution to this major public health threat, identifying climate change as the greatest health opportunity - actions taken to reduce climate crisis have substantial and immediate health benefits.

## To reduce carbon emissions across GP practices in Ealing and in line with the NHSE’s ambition2 of becoming the world’s first health service to achieve carbon-neutral by 2040, the Ealing Borough Primary Care Team adopted a leadership position and implemented the Green Initiative as part of the local primary care specifications, for the first time in April 2022. These specifications are designed to provide a quality framework for primary care.

## **What was the solution?**

## The specification was developed using research evidence, reviewed, and modified by a wider team including primary care clinical leads, with final approval from LMC. It was broken down into ‘Essential Components’ (identify a ‘Green’ champion member of staff; ensure the champion attends the suggested training over the year) and ‘Bucket List’ items (practices had to sign up for 5 or more activities). The Bucket List items focussed mainly on inhaler changes, green travel, efficient appointment timings, recycling, and medicine usage. The practices had to audit their use at the beginning of the year to evidence their change in practice. The evaluation was performed on the 31st of March 2023.

We supported GP practices by sharing simple, bite-size practical tips/guidance on how to achieve these objectives via the weekly newsletters. Emails were sent reminding practices of their targets and to continue working towards our goals. The ‘Ealing Greener Practice’ WhatsApp group was set up (June 2022) initially with 4 people and currently has 23 participants – who share learnings.

Additionally, tips and achievements were uploaded to the ‘local groups’ section (subsection ‘[Ealing](https://www.greenerpractice.co.uk/ealing/)’)3 on the national [GreenerPractice](https://www.greenerpractice.co.uk/" \t "_blank) website4, to share our learnings with the wider UK’s primary care sustainability network.

## **What were the challenges?**

## Time constraint was a challenge as regular emails and newsletter tips needed to be sent to encourage GP practices to carry out activities working towards reduction in their carbon emissions, especially since this was a new initiative. Regular contact with the practices was needed to keep the momentum in the midst of achieving other targets, increased workload, and limited workforce. Lack of communication from the practice team (especially at the initial stages) raised concerns as the Ealing Borough Primary Care Team were not aware of how the practices were coping with the suggested objectives and targets – as this initiative was the first year of implementation. In addition, ongoing contact via the ‘Ealing Greener Practice’ WhatsApp group since June 2022 helped to engage, support, and share learnings with other practices within the Ealing Borough.

## **What were the results/Impact?**

A total of 64 GP practices achieved the Green Initiative targets in 2022/23 *(see Supplementary Table)*.

The activities included: switching over 50% of metered dose inhalers (MDIs) to dry powder inhalers (DPIs), switching 50% of patients from low-dose to high-dose MDIs (e.g. 100mcg to 200mcg) and switching current MDIs to lower carbon inhalers (50%); taking time to encourage patients to reduce car use travelling to practice, encouraging staff to use alternative forms of transport or car share; providing staff training around efficient appointment timings and encouraging patients to reduce the number of appointments they attend in person and to be efficient with booking review appointments; increasing paper recycling, reducing the amount of printing/encouraging double-sided printing; discussing lifestyle intervention before starting medication, reviewing repeat prescriptions for patients taking seven or more medications and assessing their need and if it could be reduced, using social prescribers to reduce medication usage, bulk text messaging to patients reminding about safe disposal of inhalers etc.

Such activities would improve holistic patient care and staff well-being; contribute to a healthy and productive workforce; improve staff morale and practice efficiency, and ultimately reduce health inequalities. There was no direct assessment of the financial impact of these activities.

**What were the learning points?**

The primary care plays a key role in driving behavioural changes within the organisation and with patients. Every opportunity must be taken to link health problems with climate change during our consultations. Humanity, public health, and nature are not separate, and it is fundamental to see them as one to fix the climate crisis. For instance, increased physical activity, improvement in air quality, improved access to nature, and green prescribing would not only improve the physical and mental health of an individual and a community but would also contribute to mitigating the climate crisis.

By incorporating sustainability into our daily work without enforcing a considerable amount of additional work, we can engage and support the wider primary care team to achieve objectives and our goals, while reducing their environmental impact. There are a vast amount of resources and information on social media which can be disheartening and overwhelming to clinicians and non-clinicians. Providing regular bite-size practical tips would help allay anxieties and encourage GP practices to carry out these objectives. In addition, showcasing and celebrating achievements of GP practices however small it seems would motivate staff and keep the momentum going.

**Next steps:**

The Borough Sustainability Primary Care Team soon realised the importance of collaborative work with our communities, patients, partners, and staff to take steps in tackling climate change. This led us to develop the 10-point green plan for GP practices and their patients -utilising the principles of sustainable healthcare5, in December 2022 (in partnership with North West London ICS Sustainability Team). This includes a working plan that assists in the reduction of GP practices’ carbon emissions (clinical and non-clinical) while providing high-quality person-centered sustainable patient care. The aim is to demonstrate to both the staff and patient population that their practice takes their health and future seriously. Throughout this plan, the significance of raising awareness amongst staff and the patient population is emphasized, as we recognise the benefits of a concerted effort.

## For the second year, we incorporated the ideas from the 10-point green plan into the local primary care specification, Green Initiative (2023-24). We hope to replicate this Green initiative across all GP practices in NWL. Our goal is for the primary care team to reduce their environmental impact and embed sustainability into their daily work without insisting on additional work.

## **What the team and/or patients and carers had to say**

For sustainability to work in primary care, it must be accepted as a core value and not as an additional demand on general practice. This would deliver the best possible health outcomes with marginal financial and environmental costs while adding positive societal value at every opportunity.

## **Resources and references**

1. Quality of care in General Practice, Independent Inquiry report, chapter two’. The King’s Fund, 2011; 24 March: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/field_related_document/gp-inquiry-report-evolving-role-nature-2mar11.pdf>

2. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs/publication/delivering-a-net-zero-national-health-service/> [accessed 25/4/23]

3. <https://www.greenerpractice.co.uk/ealing/> [accessed 25/4/23]

4. <https://www.greenerpractice.co.uk/> [accessed 25/4/23]

5. Mortimer F, The sustainable physician, Clinical Medicine 2010, Vol 10, No 2: 110–11 [accessed 25/4/23]

## **Want to know more?**

**Contact:**

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* **Location & NHS Region if within the UK:** NWL ICB, Ealing Borough, UK
* **Partner organisations involved: [*Name of partner organisation(s); links to relevant info/resources]***
* **Has this project or story been made public in any form before?**Yes<https://bjgplife.com/going-greener-the-story-of-our-success/>

**Supplementary Table**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **SUMMARY OF EALNG GP PRACTICES’** **ACHIEVEMENTS**  **ES: GREEN INITIAITVE 2022-23** | | | |
| **KPIs** | **Total no. of participating practices** |
| **Inhaler changes** | |
| Switched over 50% of MDIs to DPIs | 14 |
| Switched 50% of patients from low-dose to high-dose MDIs (e.g. 100mcg to 200mcg) | 11 |
| Switched current MDIs to lower carbon inhalers (50%) | 42 |
| **Green Travel** | |
| Take time to encourage patients to reduce car use travelling to the practice | 33 |
| Take time to encourage alternative forms of transport for staff in the practice or possible car share if needed | 56 |
| Encourage accountability of travel e.g. use of a GPS watch to track steps, miles etc. | 35 |
| **Efficient appointment timings** | |
| Provide staff training around reduction in the number of appointments each patient attends thereby reducing the appointment attendance per patient | 47 |
| Encourage patients to reduce the number of appointments they attend in person and to be efficient with booking review appointments (e.g. Blood, BP, foot checks etc. can be done in one appointment rather than 3) | 61 |
| **Recycling** | |
| Increase paper recycling in practice by ensuring each room has a box to put paper in (ensuring appropriate disposal of confidential paper) and that staff use this paper for use rather than new paper | 41 |
| Make contact with your local pharmacies to find out where patients can drop off their used inhalers to ensure they are incinerated (this has less impact on carbon footprint than it going to landfill) | 35 |
| Reduce the amount of printing done and if it is, then encourage double-sided printing | 62 |
| Develop ways of buying supplies within your PCN from companies with green credentials | 16 |
| Re-use as many items as possible and put up signs in the practice to encourage staff to think about what they are using and how to reduce waste (conscience prodder) | 32 |
| **Medicine usage** | |
| Discuss with patients before starting a medication whether they can incorporate dietary/lifestyles changes in the first instance | 56 |
| Review repeat prescriptions for any patients on 7 or more medications to see whether they are still needed or can be reduced | 46 |
| Use social prescribing to reduce medications usage | 40 |
| MJOG message to patients to remind them of safe disposal, both inhalers and tablet strips | 14 |
| Messages on medication bags from pharmacies | 11 |
| **GIFH Toolkit completed:** | Yes - 8  Maybe next year - 44 |