



# Sustainable mental health

The Lancet Commission stated in 2009 that climate change is 'the biggest global health threat of the 21st century'. If this is the case, how do we make a mental health service system fit for the future? When...

- in 2012 the NHS emitted 20 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e – that's the same as a medium-sized country like Estonia or Slovenia
- mental health services account for 1.47 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e.

As the NHS commits to meeting the Climate Change Act 2008 target of 80% carbon reduction by 2050, one thing is clear: **less of the same is not the answer**. A transformation in clinical practice itself is required.

The NHS carbon footprint shows that even if hospitals were fully powered by renewable energy, total emissions would only be reduced by a fifth. Other solutions are needed to tackle the 18% of the carbon footprint arising from staff and patient travel and the 60% from purchased goods and services (mainly pharmaceuticals and medical supplies).

The good thing is that many of the changes we need to make to reduce carbon emissions also cut waste and financial costs, so increase value for patients.

The Royal College of Psychiatrists has funded a sustainability fellowship programme, which started in August 2013. **Dr Daniel Maughan** has been appointed as Research Fellow in Sustainability for the next 2 years. The aim of the programme is to support the transformation to sustainable mental healthcare, while at the same time improving value and efficiency.

## Principles of sustainable clinical practice:

- 1 disease prevention
- 2 patient empowerment and self-care
- 3 lean service delivery
- 4 preferential use of low-carbon technologies.

## A sustainable healthcare system...

- **sustains:** by continuing to provide a high-quality service, despite increasing constraints
- **mitigates:** by recognising the wider impact of the healthcare system on society and the environment and acting to reduce these effects
- **adapts:** by preparing for the impact that climate change might have on mental health in the future
- **focuses on value:** by using interventions and models of care that provide the most benefit at the lowest cost.

An easy win: in 2010 an estimated 22% of NHS England's greenhouse gas emissions were attributable to pharmaceuticals. As 50% of medications are actually not taken, purely by improving prescribing practice we could reduce the carbon footprint by up to 10%.

Global climate change has been described as the largest health threat of this century and people with mental health problems are likely to be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. As the risk of flooding and droughts will likely increase, mental health services need to know how to respond to these events.

## What can you do?

- **Join the network!** Post your questions and comments at <http://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/mental-health-susnet>
- **Follow the sustainability blog** at [www.rcpsych.ac.uk/sustainability](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/sustainability)
- **Become a Local Sustainability Representative** and join our national sustainability network
- **Help to write a case study** about good sustainable practices in your unit, or try out ideas that have worked elsewhere

For further information or queries, contact Daniel Maughan, Royal College of Psychiatrists' Research Fellow in Sustainability ([daniel.maughan@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk](mailto:daniel.maughan@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk)).

### Sources

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