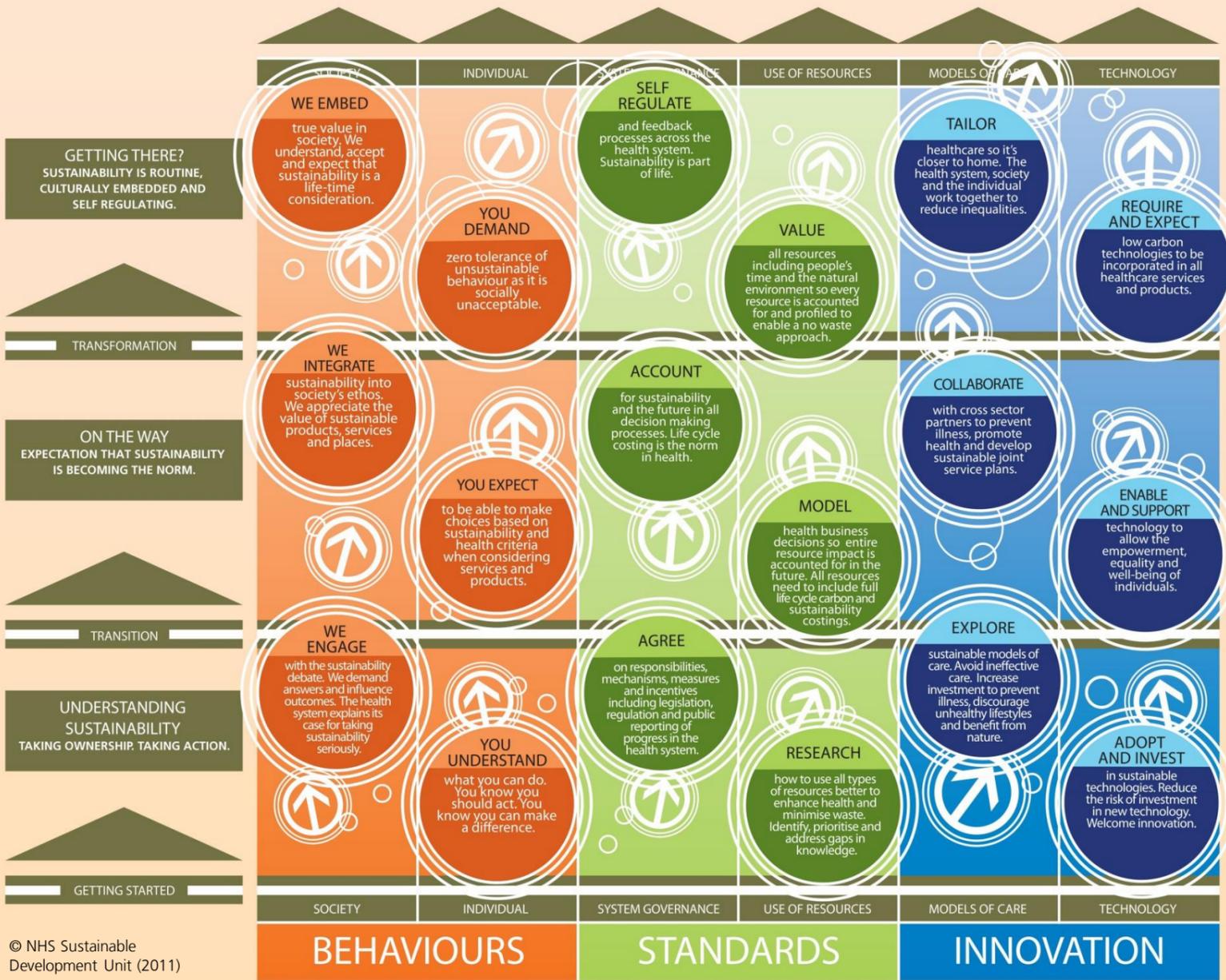


UTILISING THE 'NHS ROUTE MAP FOR SUSTAINABLE HEALTH' IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

Ben Whittaker (Occupational Therapy Programme Lead, Centre for Sustainable Healthcare)



The NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy highlights how addressing climate change is core to our society becoming healthy, just and fair and supports the UK Government's Climate Change Act target of an 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 (NHS Sustainable Development Unit 2009).

Being sustainable is about maintaining balance and making decisions that meet economic, social and environmental agendas. The NHS Route Map for Sustainable Health (left) provides a framework for developing sustainable health systems in this way (NHS Sustainable Development Unit 2011).

There is a push for significant improvements in NHS outcomes and the Route Map identifies six areas that require progress in order to improve health, save money and resources, and make enduring changes.

Below are examples of how the vision behind these six areas can be incorporated into occupational therapy practice. Consider what may be required at individual and organisational levels to make the NHS more sustainable and how the Route Map could evolve over time.

© NHS Sustainable Development Unit (2011)

SOCIETAL BEHAVIOUR

Vision: A compassionate society living in a high quality environment with reduced health inequalities.

This represents the influence society exerts, anticipating:

- a greater public awareness and appreciation of the value of sustainable products, services and places
- occupational therapy service users recognising the long term financial and social benefits of addressing health inequalities, improving green spaces and running low carbon services
- a multidisciplinary commitment to sustainable development emerging across society

Occupational therapy's communication of the reasons for a commitment to sustainability could contribute to the changing picture in both healthcare and wider society.

Integrating global wellbeing needs into occupational therapy practice would enable practitioners to work in new community settings, potentially working with a 'well population' in society that want to pursue sustainable development goals (Whittaker 2012).

SYSTEM GOVERNANCE

Vision: The health and sustainability agendas drive policy which supports individuals, society and organisations to behave in a sustainable, fair and health-conscious way.

This requires creating a standardised approach to measuring and monitoring sustainability within a new legislative framework. Accounting for sustainability becomes a component of good governance as well as whole life cycle costing. This information is visible to all, in real time, and is incorporated into operational and strategic planning in all areas of occupational therapy practice whatever the setting.

The World Federation of Occupational Therapists position paper on environmental sustainability (World Federation of Occupational Therapists 2012) stated how incorporating a sustainability perspective will enable occupational therapy to play an important role towards a vision of environmentally sustainable, fair and healthy societies. Occupational therapy associations, organisations and departments can support policies around environmentally sustainable best practice dependent on their current environmental, social and economic context.

MODELS OF CARE

Vision: Where health is less a medical matter and more about us having control over our own well-being.

This vision is already integral to occupational therapy models of care, e.g. the recovery model promotes hope and empowerment for mental health service users and reflects core occupational therapy approaches. Prevention strategies and health promotion are considered paramount.

Occupational Therapists must continue to work closely with all sectors to provide appropriate care in a fully integrated health system. The profession can encourage organisations to identify ineffective health processes and foster sustainability through commissioning arrangements at a local level, and by helping create some nationally agreed standards.

Occupational scientists and researchers can support this work by developing the evidence base required to integrate sustainable models of care into practice and reframe occupational therapy approaches and interventions, such as incorporating sustainability issues into activity analysis.

INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES

Vision: Values are redefined to encompass health and wellbeing linked to an acceptance of finite resources.

People know what they can do to be healthier and more sustainable. Occupational therapists can work with those experiencing inertia around this, holding out hope, utilising Green Lifestyle Redesign® (Dieterle 2013), activity analysis and the pacing and grading of alternatives to unsustainable occupations.

The feeling of belonging necessary for this shift to occur could also be supported, for example, through greater community engagement and exploration of green spaces. Education is part of this development, as is creating a supportive peer community such as the Occupational Therapy Sustainable Practice Network (OT Susnet).

People can exert influence on others with the expectation that everyone makes sustainable choices. This change in behaviour is similar to the peer pressure and acknowledgement of individual culpability that made drink-driving unacceptable.

USE OF RESOURCES

Vision: We live with the resources that our planet can support instead of the 2.5 planets that we are currently using.

This includes considering the true value and cost of all types of occupational therapy resources: human time, commitment, green space and not just oil, carbon and water. For example, ensuring items are reused, waste minimised and human time and services are used more efficiently.

Occupational therapists could utilise Sustainable Action Planning (Centre for Sustainable Healthcare 2010) to identify opportunities for change and create an action plan, which can be adopted into their team's routine management processes, becoming the framework for ongoing sustainability improvements and bringing significant monetary savings.

In working together for sustainability, teams are contributing to service improvement, benefiting not just the health of people and the environment, but also the quality of care. Research clarifies how resources can best be used.

TECHNOLOGY

Vision: Technology is an enabler of positive societal and environmental change.

This Route Map theme refers to the investment in low carbon and health technologies, promoting examination of the use of aids and adaptations. Occupational therapy needs to partner with all its stakeholders to achieve sustainable goals and invest in low carbon technologies.

This could include tools that people use to empower them when they're outside sessions and reinforce face-to-face meetings, or using existing technology such as telephones to support models of care and deliver what practitioners already know works.

Every innovation board, procurement process, business case and strategic planning procedure should include references to the use and development of sustainable technologies and how this will reduce health inequalities and develop healthy communities. Together occupational therapists can develop criteria to judge success and share progress.

REFERENCES: Centre for Sustainable Healthcare (2010) Sustainable action planning. Available at: www.sap.greenerhealthcare.org Accessed 04.03.2013. Dieterle C (2013) Creating a sustainable lifestyle. Available at: www.sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/occupational-therapy-sustainable-practice-network-ot-susnet/blog/2013/02/creating-sustainable-lifest Accessed on: 04.03.2013. NHS Sustainable Development Unit (2009) Saving carbon, improving health: NHS carbon reduction strategy for England. Cambridge: NHS SDU. NHS Sustainable Development Unit (2011) Route map for sustainable health. Cambridge: NHS SDU. Whittaker B (2012) Sustainable global wellbeing: a proposed expansion of the occupational therapy paradigm. British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 75(9), 436-439. World Federation of Occupational Therapists (2012) Position statement on environmental sustainability: sustainable practice within occupational therapy. Forresterfield, Au: WFOT. **EMAIL:** ben.whittaker@sustainablehealthcare.org.uk **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:** Thank you to Sonia Roschnik and Charles Kitchin at the NHS Sustainable Development Unit for their support in adapting the 'NHS Route Map for Sustainable Health' for this poster and to Frances Mortimer at the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare.

