

Report on Sustainability in Medical Education Development Session, Primary Care Teaching Committee 19/4/21

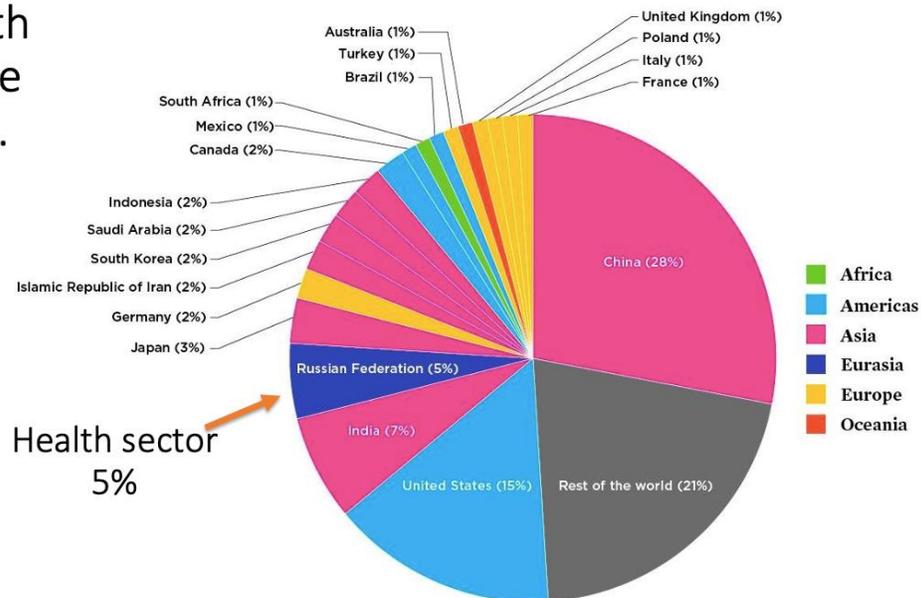
Many governments and societies across the world have declared a climate emergency. The Lancet and the WHO have named climate change as the greatest global health threat of our time. UCL have a [sustainability strategy](#), looking at ways to implement a truly sustainable university and how we, as an institution, can work towards the UN's Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs). Our team has been involved in some of these initiatives including the UCL sustainability awards, where our Culinary Medicine in Primary Care course was nominated for highlighting the impact of dietary choices on sustainability; this course has now been linked to [SDG 3 - Good health and Wellbeing](#).

Kay Leadham-Green gave an inspirational talk to start off the meeting featuring some show-stopping statistics:



Source: Naylor C, Appleby J (2012). Report. Sustainable health and social care: Connecting environmental and financial performance

If the health sector were a country...



Each Country's Share of CO2 Emissions

Kay identified two main mitigation strategies available to health care:

1. To use our influence in society, purchasing power etc as an agent for change.
2. To be an example of what can be achieved by reducing our carbon footprint to net zero in line with the NHS' recent commitment.

We need to educate ourselves, our tutors and our students about how we can reduce the carbon emissions of the healthcare we provide and disseminate this information. One way which the team discussed doing this was by encouraging students to complete QI projects on sustainability. Kay highlighted two great tools:

1. <https://www.susqi.org/>
2. [Green impact for health toolkit](#)

Flo Fawkes and Mehar Singh gave a great short talk outlining the findings of their working group 2021 report on Climate Change and Sustainability in the UCLMS MBBS Curriculum (please see attached copy of report for more information). They propose considering climate and sustainability from two perspectives: the impact of the environment on health and the impact of the healthcare industry on the environment. They highlighted the importance of incorporating sustainability, and its impact, all the way through medical school. We discussed reducing the impact of healthcare on the environment by increasing teaching on 1) preventative medicine and 2) the use of generalist expertise to ensure appropriate medicalization / investigation of problems. If you can stop someone developing an illness, or being over-investigated for a disease, then you save a lot of emissions, and money, on medications to treat it. As a department, we have introduced a new lifestyle medicine SSC which explores the role of lifestyle in both prevention and management of disease. We also have the Core GP Year 5 sustainability and 're-thinking medicine' Core Teaching Week sessions, Health-Justice and Culinary Medicine sessions. Often lower carbon care is easier, better for patients, and cheaper. Low carbon approaches advocated for in the NHS Net Zero plans include preventative medicine, health coaching, social prescribing and personalised care and we are shifting our teaching perspectives to focus more on these models. Another proposal was to investigate the possibility of becoming the first parkrun medical school to improve the lifestyle of our students and staff, and get more involved in our local community. We discussed grouping face-to-face teaching together (when COVID allows) in order to reduce commuting for students and staff and re-evaluating our wider global travel e.g. for conferences. We should learn from our online experiences during COVID and incorporate the positives into a more sustainable lifestyle.

We discussed shifting the focus of healthcare from: "What's my patient's diagnosis and what can I prescribe?" to "Why has my patient become unwell and what can we do about that?". We need to emphasise the role of health promotion and train our students in techniques such as motivational interviewing to help facilitate the behavioural change required. We need to look closer and address the upstream determinants of health to provide better, greener healthcare and adjust the perception of what the role of a doctor is. This is a message that needs to start with us and our teaching. There is an appetite for change amongst our students and we need to seize this opportunity to make a meaningful change to the sustainability of the medical education we provide.

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