

Climate Change and Primary Health Care

Introduction

Climate change is one of the most serious concerns we face as a planet. In addition, there is much to be done to reduce environmental damage caused by mankind. The COP 26 climate change conference in Glasgow in 2021 increased awareness of these challenges and brought attention to many issues relating to the climate and the environment.

Climate change, environmental damage and pollution are all bad for our health. Worsening air pollution, increasingly hot weather and floods etc, will have a detrimental impact on our patients and society, and our ability to provide healthcare. The provision of healthcare itself, releases a lot of carbon into the atmosphere causing climate change, further damaging our health.

Reducing climate change is an enormous task and many clinicians feel they don't know where to start – at home and at work. But there are shared benefits of encouraging healthier activities – benefits both for our environment, and for the wellbeing of patients and clinicians. Often what is good for the planet is good for us and our patients too.

This module was constructed by four NES medical education and health inequality fellows who share an interest in climate change and sustainability. This module cannot cover all the important issues but may give clinicians some ideas for change in their professional and personal lives. Like all of our modules, the cases are based on learning needs, identified from a focus group of clinicians.

Aims of the module:

1. to raise awareness of the impact of primary healthcare on climate change
2. to examine a range of prescribing issues including the reduction of metered dose inhalers, reducing prescription waste and considering alternatives to prescribing
3. adopting 'greener' behaviours in urban and rural practice areas, consider the impact of impact of travelling on the environment and air quality

This module has considerable amounts of information (15 pages compared to the usual 10 -12 pages) with hyperlinks to online resources and further reading. You may want to study three of the four cases at your meeting, or study the module over several meetings to get the most out of it.