

SUPPLIERS, SOCIAL VALUE AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE PATHOLOGY NETWORK MATURITY MATRIX

We know that the supply chain makes up a significant proportion of the carbon footprint of the services that we provide. You don't have to be in a lab for very long to notice the sheer volume of 'stuff' that we use: large, multi-component equipment, single use kits, harmful chemicals and tonnes of non-recyclable plastic.

We need to work with our suppliers to reduce this impact as far as is practicable. Therefore, I was delighted to represent the Association by speaking at BIVDA's Spring Sustainability Seminar in April. Approximately 25 individuals from a range of manufacturers and suppliers heard a day of talks from senior pathology leaders across the devolved nations. I highlighted that many lab teams genuinely want to do more to reduce their environmental impact but often don't know where to start. We discussed how professional bodies, such as our Green Champions (in collaboration with IBMS and RCPATH) can help, as well as forming good relationships with our commercial partners. I gave an overview of my lab's experience with LEAF and stressed that while we should strive to make our labs as 'green' as possible, this is only one aspect of a complex specimen journey. I broached the topic of diagnostic stewardship, essentially doing the right test on the right patient at the right time. We all know that we process large numbers of low value and unnecessary samples every day. I was heartened to hear zero push-back from those present about doing fewer tests and there seems to be a rapidly growing enthusiasm to tackle the problem of climate change.

Each company present had a sustainability lead. Like us in the NHS, most had asked an existing team member to take on this role, and only one company had created a new substantive position. This highlights to us in labs, as in industry, that while progress is being made, there

ROB SHORTEN

Consultant Clinical Scientist,
Department of Microbiology,
Lancashire Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

is still a long road ahead. One attendee noted that if a sustainability lead is appointed, then others within the organisation feel that it is not their responsibility as this is 'taken care of'. I highlighted that, as part of LEAF, sustainability has been added to our lab's staff induction, highlighting how it is everyone's responsibility. A discussion was held around how this can be embedded into teams, as health and safety is now – it is everyone's responsibility.

Much of the discussions revolved around suppliers' requirements to use the [Evergreen Sustainable Supplier Agreement](#).

Many suppliers are at an early stage and calculating (and working to reduce) carbon footprints of complex multi-territory supply chains is no mean feat. One further hot topic is [Social Value](#). Suppliers are now obligated to build this into tenders, and it is designed to 'help reduce health inequalities, drive better environmental performance, and deliver even more value from procured products and services'. Examples include the provision of educational opportunities, revitalisation of green spaces and working with local charities in the community of the

NHS Trust. Much debate was had reading what social value was and how to include it in tenders. There often appears to be a disconnect between us in the labs, our procurement teams and our suppliers. The consensus was that we all should communicate much more to establish what is important to us and our communities. A final point of warning was made. There are strict rules in place to prevent departments asking for, and suppliers offering, financial incentives during tendering processes. There was much debate about where these lines lie and how to ensure that no rules are broken.

Finally, on another subject. You may be aware that environmental sustainability has very recently been added to the Pathology Network Maturity Matrix. Sustainability goals have been inserted into all seven domains, and it is up to us to progress our services towards 'thriving'. Whilst these are not being scored (yet), it is worth considering that 'green' services are often efficient, cheaper and of high quality. Moving towards a sustainable service is a win-win and we should embrace this challenge.