

GREENER HEALTHCARE AND SUSTAINABILITY PROJECT – ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Greener Healthcare And Sustainability Project (GHASP) hosted their annual conference in Leeds at the end of September, and I attended in person. Although there was no pathology on the agenda, I hoped the meeting would give me the opportunity to meet some like-minded healthcare professionals from other areas of the NHS and to learn about sustainability projects, successes and challenges across healthcare. It didn't disappoint.

GHASP was a new concept to me; a colleague who knows I have an interest in sustainability had forwarded me the link for the conference. The GHASP mission statement is to take immediate and collective action to reduce the environmental impact of healthcare, and the theme of the conference was collaboration. Speakers from a wide range of NHS backgrounds delivered their personal messages about how the NHS as an organisation, and every individual, can influence climate change. Coffee breaks were lengthy and designed to give us time to network and to read the posters outlining the environmental work currently being undertaken throughout the NHS.

Each speaker described both how healthcare is contributing to climate change and the changes needed to reduce this impact, in some very different areas. The theme that linked each of the presentations was the power of collaboration to affect meaningful change.

You can change the world

Jonny Groome, a paediatric anaesthetist, set the scene for us with his presentation “The clock is ticking....” Atmospheric CO₂ has increased rapidly since the 1800s and there is no doubt that climate change is being driven by humankind. November 2023 saw the 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29), yet global and sea surface temperatures continue to increase, and extreme weather events are occurring more frequently, and in places we wouldn't expect. It's clear that governments alone cannot solve this crisis. It needs the same

by

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consumerism-driven values that have exploded since the industrial revolution to seek alternative means of harnessing and using clean energy, reducing waste and capturing carbon. Manufacturers and suppliers will only change what they do and how they do it when the consumer demands it of them. And the NHS is a big consumer.

But each one of us are consumers with buying power. Real Zero is a non-profit organisation that has partnered with the NHS and private healthcare providers to address carbon emissions with an approach combining education, action and collaboration to create meaningful change. They have come up with [Seven Acts](#) that you can do today to make a difference.

1. Move your money – to a bank that doesn't invest in fossil fuels
2. Move your power supplier – to a 100% renewable source
3. Eat more plant-based food – seasonal and local, where possible
4. More green travel – walking and cycling, more trains, fewer planes
5. More pre-loved – shop local and low-carbon brands
6. Measure your CO₂ footprint – and cut it where you can
7. Motivate your loved ones to perform their seven acts to save the world

We were each challenged to commit to making one change. Since the meeting, I have changed my current account to a bank with a much lower carbon footprint. It was easy, using the UK's Current Account Switch Service. What change can you make?

Collaborating with patients

This next talk was given by a local GP, Sally Franks, who is a founding member of the West Yorkshire Greener Practice Group. [Greener Practice](#) is a network of healthcare professionals working together to inspire sustainability in primary care and is made up

of 30 regional groups across the UK. Membership includes GPs, pharmacists, practice managers and the Integrated Care Board (ICB) members. Dr Franks highlighted some of the projects undertaken by regional groups in collaboration with patients, to improve health and the environment. These included blister pack collection hubs, unreturned medical equipment amnesties, and an asthma toolkit (available at www.greenerpractice.co.uk, along with many other resources), which makes it easier for general practices in the UK to implement better and greener asthma care, safely and effectively.

Everything, everywhere, all at once

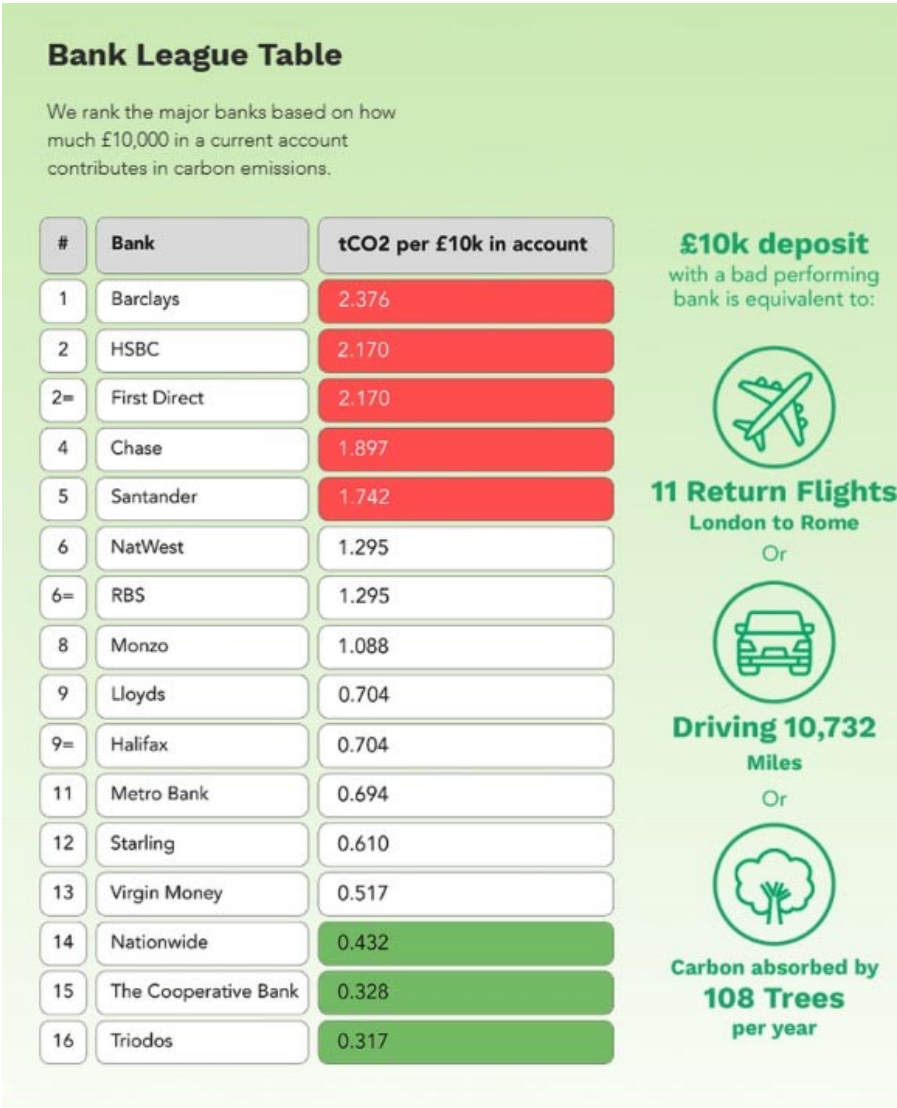
The last speaker before lunch was Alexis Percival, the first ever sustainability manager for an ambulance service in England. Alexis inspired the audience with a whistle-stop tour of her indefatigable efforts over the previous 15 years. From planting almost 5,000 trees to installing solar panels, from upgrading toilets and hand-dryers to testing reusable facemasks in the middle of the pandemic, Alexis has not restricted her efforts to [Scope 1 and 2 emissions](#) produced by the ambulance service. However, the CO₂ impact of the ambulance service is huge. In the Yorkshire Ambulance Service, over 98% of the fleet are diesel, covering around 40 million miles each year. Alexis has worked collaboratively to improve the efficiency of the diesel fleet, but by 2030 all new ambulances must be zero emission, a challenge she cannot meet alone. But encouragingly, England now has its first two electric NHS ambulances, with a range of 120 miles, in the London Ambulance Service. Two further vehicles will join the Yorkshire fleet next year.

The devil and the deep blue sea

After a delicious plant-based lunch, we heard from Paul Southall, an environmental advisor to the Royal College of Anaesthetists and member of [Healthcare Ocean](#). Dr Southall's

presentation focussed on the largely forgotten impact of the health of the ocean on climate change. The ocean covers 71% of the earth's surface and absorbs 90% of the planet's excess heat. It is responsible for up to 50% of all carbon capture and produces at least 50% of our atmospheric oxygen. However, our oceans are getting warmer, levels are rising, and they are more acidic than they have been for the past 300 million years, at a rate of change comparable to previous mass extinction events.

Multiple factors influence the health of the oceans, with shipping being a significant contributor. Global shipping produces 1 billion tonnes of CO₂ annually, and has other negative environmental impacts such as oil spills, movement of non-indigenous species, whale strikes and wastewater discharge from ships. Over 60% of the NHS carbon footprint arises from global supply chain emissions, with 80% of goods supplied to the NHS arriving by ship. The NHS has committed to reaching net

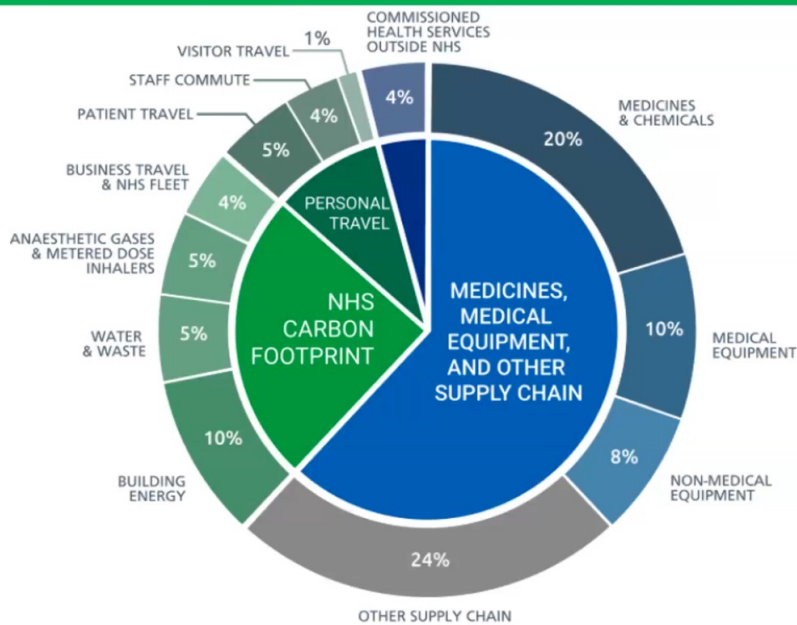


Carbon Emissions Bank League Table - updated June 2023 (mymothertree.com)

zero by 2045 for the emissions related to the goods and services we buy. We cannot get to net zero without net zero ships. In order to achieve this, NHS England are working with the [Aspen Institute](#) to support the delivery of [coZEV](#) (Cargo Owners for Zero Emission Vessels), a platform through which NHS cargo owners can engage and amplify their voice in calling for the decarbonisation of a sector on which healthcare is dependent. By demanding net zero transport of NHS goods, we can influence bigger change across the global shipping sector.

I found the meeting both disheartening and inspiring. The scale of the global challenge we face, compared with the relatively minor influence the UK as a whole, the NHS as a sector, and that I as an individual can have, is sometimes enough to make me wonder why even bother. But I was inspired by each of the speakers' passion and belief that every one of us has the power to make a difference. Positive change will only be significant and sustained if we collaborate.

NHS Carbon Footprint



Greener NHS Delivering a Net Zero NHS