Greening perioperative care

- The NHS produces as much CO₂ each year as the whole of Estonia.
- 25% of all public sector CO₂ emissions come from the NHS.
- Last year the NHS produced 576,000 tonnes of waste and that increases every year.
- It costs £71.2m to dispose of the NHS’s waste.

These are some stark facts showing the scale of the task we face to make healthcare greener. And these figures are only for the NHS – they don’t include the independent sector.

As AfPP President I attended the British Association of Day Surgery (BADS) annual conference in Southport in June. Dr Maggie Nicol delivered a fascinating talk on recycling and day surgery revealing just how much more we can do to make perioperative care more environmentally friendly.

There is a lot of legislation and committees dedicated to making the NHS greener: the NHS Sustainable Development Unit, the Climate Change Law, the Department of Health Mindmap and so on. These laws and regulations pile on top of various international treaties such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the WEEE Directive (waste electrical and electronic equipment) and the Kyoto Treaty.

But despite all of this it is still people who make the difference. And that person could be you. Professor Jacqueline McGlade is head of the European Environment Agency. She got it spot on when she said: ‘Climate crisis needs empowered people’.

You can lead the way.

Start questioning your routine, everyday actions and ask whether things can be done differently. Lobby your Trust to get paper and cardboard recycling bins – if the NHS recycled all its paper and cardboard it would save 42,000 tonnes of CO₂.

Ask companies about refilling empties. It saves on new packaging but also means an empty lorry doesn’t leave after a delivery.

Are you correctly separating your clinical waste from your ‘domestic’ waste and looking at segregating that waste for potential recycling?

As a perioperative practitioner you can lead from the front and AfPP will support you. But we also want to hear from you and your colleagues. What green initiatives have you implemented? Where do you see opportunities to divert waste from landfill? What energy saving activities could be implemented in your Trust? Please let us know so that we can share the information through the AfPP network.

Diane Gilmour
President AfPP
You can email Diane about your environmental initiatives or ideas at president@afpp.org.uk.
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