

PLANETARY HEALTH

THE HEALTH OF HUMAN CIVILISATION AND THE SYSTEMS UPON WHICH IT DEPENDS

'Climate Change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century'¹

If global healthcare were a country it would be the 5th largest emitter of carbon in the world.²

The climate emergency is rapidly undermining the future survival of all species¹

May 2019 - the Irish Government declared a climate and biodiversity emergency.

WONCA has called on all family doctors to act on Planetary health. globalfamilydoctor.org

WHAT GPs CAN DO: PRESCRIBING AND PATIENT CARE



PRESCRIBING

This can account for up to 50% of the carbon footprint in General Practice.³ Prescription reviews reduce unnecessary medications. Advise re safe medication disposal.



INHALERS

Metered dose inhalers have a carbon footprint X18 times that of dry powdered inhalers. Inhaler propellant gases are highly potent Greenhouse gases which are 1480-2900 as potent as Co2.⁴ Practical tips and further breakdown at the excellent greeninhaler.org



ANTIBIOTICS

Antibiotic resistance poses a threat to our health and the planet. The animal food industry uses large amounts of antibiotics many of which are human grade. Being mindful of what we consume as well as what we prescribe can help safeguard our antibiotics antibioticprescribing.ie



LIFESTYLE ADVICE

80% of chronic disease is preventable by addressing diet and lifestyle factors⁵



GREEN & SOCIAL PRESCRIBING

Promoting active transport, nature and social based interventions, improves well being, reduces depression and stress related symptoms.⁶



PLANT BASED DIET

Food production accounts for almost 20% of global carbon emissions. Avoiding animal products for two out of three meals could reduce emissions by 60%. Plant based diets are consistent with the longest living and healthiest populations around the world.⁷



WHAT GPs CAN DO: IN THE PRACTICE



Check out Planetary health on ICGP.ie for more information

WASTE

Ensure everyone in the practice is aware of the recycling and waste policy. Yellow waste bags require large amounts of energy to process. Tackle single use plastics where possible.



OFFICE

Consider switching to renewable energy. Save up to 30% off your energy bill by becoming more energy efficient. Turning down the thermostat by 1 degree can save 10% from your heating bill. Using low energy light bulbs can cut lighting cost by up to 20%.



ECO COMMUNICATIONS

Covid 19 has proven much of our workload can be performed virtually, avoiding patient travel. Opt for email/text over paper. Double copy/print, recycle and use sustainably sourced paper.



USE OF RESOURCES

Avoiding waste and promoting value are about quality of care, not shortcuts. Advanced planning directives comply with patient wishes and avoid unwanted hospital journeys. Agree a practice policy on blood tests, radiology referrals, screening etc. www.choosingwisely.org is an excellent resource.



¹ The Lancet Planetary Health

² Healthcare without harm, Climate Smart Health Care Series, Green Paper one

³ NHS Sustainability Development Unit

⁴ Inhaled drugs and global warming. BMJ DOI:10.1136

⁵ Healthy living is the best revenge: Findings from the EPIC and Nutrition- Potsdam study. Ford ES et al. Arch Intern Med 2009 Aug

⁶ An evaluation of the green prescription programme Donegal 2013 HSE.

⁷ Multiple health and environmental impacts of foods; Clark M et al; PNAS November 12, 2019

⁸ PBD: PNAS November 12, 2019 116 (46) 23357-23362; first published October 28, 2019

<https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1906908116>

⁹ Audsley E, Brander M, Chatterton J, Murphy-Bokern D, Webster C, Williams A (2009) How low can we go? an assessment of greenhouse gas emissions from the UK food system and the scope to reduce them by 2050. Food Climate Research Network & WWF, London, UK

¹⁰ choosingwisely.org