

Environmental Sustainability in Emergency Medicine

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Introduction

In the context of our greater understanding of the climate crisis and its health effects, there has been a recent drive in addressing the environmental sustainability of healthcare, with in England the creation of Greener NHS and national targets for healthcare systems to get to net zero carbon between 2040 and 2045.

Environmental sustainability is an emerging area within emergency care and as such there are yet no clearly defined standards. There are however clear recommendations in this field.

Recommendations

1. To become accredited with the GreenED programme.
2. To train in sustainable quality improvement

Background

The climate crisis is the greatest health threat of the 21st century[1], healthcare systems around the world have started to address this.

RCEM has published a position statement on environmentally sustainable emergency healthcare[2] which has five recommendations on how the specialty of emergency medicine can address its environmental sustainability.

The carbon footprint of the UK health system is approximately 4% of the UK total, therefore, to achieve net zero we are obliged to reduce the carbon footprint of our practice.

Low carbon or net zero emergency healthcare does not yet exist however to move towards this goal RCEM has developed the GreenED[3] framework which guides departments on making sustainable changes. The GreenED framework will continue to develop, with the goal of getting to net zero emergency care.

A vital part of this process will be through quality improvement work. Our second recommendation is for emergency care practitioners to train in sustainable quality improvement work or susQI. This has been developed by the Centre for sustainable Healthcare[4]. By using SusQI you embed sustainability into current QI theory and practice and thus provides tools to enable healthcare workers to provide sustainable health system transformation.

References

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3. *GreenED. RCEM. 2024.*
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4. *What is SusQI? Centre for Sustainable Healthcare. 2024.*
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