

Shaping the future of public health

Promoting health in the NHS

February 2008

AVERTING CATASTROPHE FROM CLIMATE CHANGE: JOIN THE MOVEMENT TO A HEALTHY SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Why we must all act now

At the end of January, 19 organisations – including the Royal Society of Health - signed a statement issued by the Faculty of Public Health that it was time to act on climate change in order to avert an impending public health catastrophe of immense proportions.

We are now very close to a global average temperature increase of two degrees centigrade, or 450 parts per million carbon dioxide equivalent, beyond which dangerous climate change is probably inevitable. We need to mobilise for action at every level – individual, organisational, political. We all need to reduce our carbon emissions substantially *over the next five years* before climate change becomes unmanageable.

As well as the obvious health consequences due to heat waves, flooding and so on, the global health impacts of climate change on the UK include rising food prices due to crop failure (which you will have noticed is already happening), and armed conflict over loss of land in Asia and Africa leading to massive population displacement. But most fundamentally of all, climate change and other pressures are destroying the evolutionary context in which we humans developed and to which we are adapted. We are losing three species an hour, six out of ten species are very likely to become extinct: we are entering the sixth mass extinction of life on earth.

Action on climate change also helps with other major health priorities. Using cars less reduces carbon dioxide emissions and encourages people to walk and cycle more. A diet with less meat and processed food is healthy as well as being lower in carbon.

Resources to help you

Climate Change Speaker training on 14th March in London
We have arranged for COIN (Climate Outreach and Information Network - see <http://coinet.org.uk> for further information) to run a day's speaker training for those of us in health interested in communicating with our own workplace, other NHS organisations, and our local communities. The training develops your speaking skills and builds your confidence in the communicating climate change message to help people take action. It will be on **14th March** at **the Friend's House, Euston Road, London.**

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To cover costs the fee for the day will be £50. Email Alison Hill <mailto:alison.hill@sepho.nhs.uk> if you are interested in attending. We will send out a programme and a booking form shortly. Can you send this round your networks; we would be glad if you could let others know about the training.

A guide ‘Sustaining a Healthy Future: Taking Action on Climate Change’ has been published by the Faculty of Public Health in association with a wide range of other health groups and organisations. It is short, accessible and offers lots of practical ideas. A copy has been sent to every Primary Care Trust in England. You can download it from the Faculty’s website:

http://www.fph.org.uk/resources/sustainable_development/sustaining_a_healthy_future.asp

We have set up a Health and Sustainable Development network to provide support – see www.healthandsustainability.net. The Faculty of Public Health has an e-group which could enable you to share ideas. I am available to speak at and join in workshops.

What you can do

As well as taking action as individuals, families, groups and organisations, health promotion staff can do so much to mobilise both the health community and the public. You build capacity, you help people to make informed choices through information, resources, training and support, you empower communities in all the different settings, you develop health programmes and services. Your work can touch everybody’s lives.

- Walking for health schemes could promote discussion about carbon literacy amongst walkers.
- Food and health programmes could highlight that healthy diets are much lower in carbon emissions.
- You could bring the ideas in the Eco-Schools programme (see <http://www.eco-schools.org.uk>) into the Healthy Schools programme.
- You could bring messages concerning climate change into workplace health programmes.
- You could develop health promotion resources on carbon reduction.
- You could run community sessions on carbon literacy, promoting carbon audits in households and encouraging people to measure their progress in reducing their carbon emissions as a matter of habit.

You will have lots of other ideas.

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