

NHS KIDNEY CARE SPONSORS “GREENING” OF THE SPECIALTY

Green Nephrology communications briefing 01 December 2009

Kidney care has this year become the first clinical specialty to address its environmental impact, with the creation of a “Green Nephrology” programme. The initiative now has a dedicated resource from NHS Kidney Care in the form of “Green Nephrology Fellow”, Dr. Andy Connor, who has been seconded from his specialty training in the South West. Since taking up the first-of-a-kind Fellowship in September, Dr Connor has recruited Green Nephrology Local Representatives in over half of kidney units nationwide, hosted a webinar on water savings in haemodialysis, and drawn up plans for carbon footprinting kidney care.

Quotes:

Green Nephrology Fellow, Dr. Connor said: “by working together for sustainability, we are unlocking opportunities to increase the quality of care, empower patients and reduce costs.”

National Clinical Director for Kidney Care, Department of Health, Dr. Donal O’Donoghue, said “we will be supporting all kidney teams to measure and find innovative ways to improve our carbon footprint”,

Beverley Matthews of NHS Kidney Care said, “we are delighted to invest in something which has the ability to improve quality of care whilst meeting the carbon agenda. Green Nephrology has widespread support from across the kidney community.”

Dr. Frances Mortimer, Medical Director of the Campaign for Greener Healthcare: “spending on kidney care makes up about 1.5% of the total NHS budget. If it accounts for a similar proportion of NHS carbon emissions, then kidney care has a carbon footprint of at least 270,000 tonnes CO₂ every year, in England alone. Streamlining services, buying better products, and supporting patient self-care can all help to shrink the carbon footprint while benefiting patients and staff.”

Andy Williamson, Chair – GSTT Kidney Patients’ Association: “As a kidney patient, I’m acutely aware of my own vulnerability to climate events, and my dependence on drugs and dialysis equipment which rely on cheap oil for their availability. Reducing the amount of energy we use in the health service should have been a top priority for years.” June 2009

Gill Donaldson, President of the Association of Renal Industries said, “The environmental impact of kidney care within the UK is well documented. The Association of Renal Industries is pleased to

collaborate with the campaign and specifically support Andrew Connor in his fellowship to improve the environmental sustainability of renal care. This support will utilise the industries extensive network of contacts which will in turn help with awareness, sharing good practice and ensuring effective communication.”

NOTES

What is Green Nephrology?

Green Nephrology is a new and rapidly evolving dimension of kidney care. The programme brings together staff, patients, suppliers and policy makers from kidney care to improve the health of the environment and that of kidney patients.

A Brief History of Green Nephrology

In February 2009, senior clinicians and policy makers from kidney care attended a “Green Nephrology Summit” organised by the Campaign for Greener Healthcare and sponsored by Baxter Healthcare. A number of existing environmental initiatives were discussed (including dialysis water recycling, packaging reductions and virtual clinics), as opportunities for sustainable service commissioning and provision were explored. It was clear that there was no shared learning or a systematic approach to sustainability within the specialty. The participants of the summit were keen to change this.

The solution, the Green Nephrology Programme, was proposed to further explore the impact of kidney care on the environment, to identify opportunities for improvements, and to support initiatives to increase sustainability within local service provision. An early step was the creation of a Green Nephrology Fellowship within the Campaign for Greener Healthcare, funded by NHS Kidney Care and supported by the Renal Association, the British Renal Society, the Association of Renal Industries and the National Kidney Federation. The outputs of this Fellowship and other ventures will feed into the renal pages of SHEBA – the sustainable healthcare evidence base launched by the Campaign for Greener Healthcare.

Why do we need Green Nephrology?

Climate change is not only the biggest threat to global health in the 21st century (1), but presents an acute challenge to 21st century health services. Whilst all individuals and organisations must take action to reduce their carbon footprints, the healthcare sector must take the lead on this. The NHS has already committed itself to meeting the UK Climate Change Act’s target of 80% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050 (2). Reductions on this scale cannot be achieved by small efficiency changes – a transformation in clinical services is required.

The nature of kidney care is such that it is likely to contribute disproportionately to the carbon footprint of the NHS (18.6 million tonnes of CO₂ in England, in 2004) (3). The Green Nephrology Programme

aims to work across the renal community to integrate sustainability into kidney care – from procurement of resources, through the design of the clinical pathways, to the delivery of care.

An additional motivation is the fact that kidney patients are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Extremes of weather can disrupt the provision of the care they rely upon (for example, a haemodialysis service may be disrupted by storms or flooding). Extremes of weather may also affect kidney patients themselves; for example, they are particularly at risk in hot weather (4).

What are the benefits of Green Nephrology?

Green nephrology will bring huge and varied benefits to all aspects of kidney care. Low carbon kidney care will emphasize the importance of the prevention of kidney disease. Patients will, where possible, be empowered to take on a greater role in managing their own health and the way in which their care is delivered. Care systems will be streamlined, minimising travel and low-value activity whilst also reducing financial costs. Treatment will utilise effective and proven technologies with the lowest carbon footprints. Staff and patient morale will benefit from improvements in the healthcare environments. Green nephrology will allow local units to meet recent legislative targets, and will see the standing of participating organisations rise as a result of their good corporate citizenship.

What is happening now in Green Nephrology?

Activities have taken off with the arrival of the Green Nephrology Fellow, Andy Connor, in September 2009. Andy's first priority has been to find Local Representatives for individual kidney units and set up an online survey, the results of which will help to shape the programme. Over the coming months, the Programme will be examining the carbon footprint of renal services. Alongside this, Andy will be working with Local Representatives (staff and patients) to develop case studies of good practice and educate the wider renal community on sustainability. He will also be collaborating with policy makers to encourage sustainable commissioning and with the renal industry to promote sustainable procurement, and working with patients to deliver more sustainable care in the ways that they would wish.

What can you do?

All members of the renal community are needed!

Kidney Care Units & Staff

- Ensure your unit has a Champion / Local Representative
- Complete the online Green Nephrology Renal Unit Survey
- Undertake a sustainability audit and develop a green action plan
- Take action to reduce your unit's emissions using the CGH 10:10 Ward Checklist (<http://www.greenerhealthcare.org/1010-ward-checklist>)

transforming healthcare for a sustainable future

- Tell us about examples of good sustainable practice in your unit
- Raise awareness in your unit; tell your doctors, nurses, technicians, etc

Kidney Patients, Relatives and Carers

- Team up with your unit's Local Representative to develop and implement your own ideas around sustainable practice
- Raise awareness in your unit – ensure it is represented!

Industry Members

- Consider sponsoring Green Nephrology events and ventures
- Work with us to improve sustainable procurement

Everyone

- Register to join the Green Nephrology email announcement list by contacting the current Fellow at andrew.connor@kintoa.org
- Share your ideas for greening kidney care online through the Greener Healthcare 2degrees network. (Join the network at: www.2degreesnetwork.com/collaborate/networks/greener-healthcare/ and look out for kidney-related events, blogs and forum discussions)

Where can you find out more?

Seek out the Green Nephrology Champion in your local unit or visit the following websites:

- www.greenerhealthcare.org/green-nephrology
- www.sustainabilityforhealth.net/renal
- www.2degreesnetwork.com/collaborate/networks/greener-healthcare/
- www.carbonaddict.org

References

1. *UCL Lancet Commission (2009) 'Managing the health effects of climate change.' The Lancet, 373(9676), 1693-1733.*
2. *NHS Sustainable Development Unit (2009) 'Saving Carbon, Improving Health: NHS Carbon Reduction Strategy for England.'*
3. *NHS (2008) 'NHS England Carbon Emissions: Carbon Footprinting Report 2008'*
4. *Department of Health (2009) 'Heatwave Plan: 2009'*