



There is no Planet B

Conference on Climate Change, Sustainability & Health Inequalities

Abstract

BAPIO Women's Forum in collaboration with Milton Keynes University Hospital (MKUH) held a conference on 'Climate change, sustainability and Health inequalities' in May 2022. This article details the highlights of the conference and the key messages of the interdependencies of women's health, tackling inequalities and the impact on the climate.

Keywords

Climate crisis, climate change, gender equality, health inequalities

Background

Climate change has a clear impact on the social and environmental determinants of health including affecting clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food, and secure shelter. Globally climate change is expected to cause nearly 250,000 additional deaths per year between 2030-2050 and this is likely to have a significant impact on the healthcare sector. It is also known that women and children suffer the most health risks caused by climate change.

Born from the need for fairer gender representation for medical professionals from ethnic minorities, the BAPIO Women's Forum (BWF) was founded in 2012. In 2021, the new BWF executive committee decided to take a fresh look at the injustice and inequalities that are still very prevalent in our healthcare system. These inequalities affect not only healthcare professionals from minority backgrounds, but also have a similar impact on patients. It is our belief that gender equality is one of the keys to climate change action as they both are very closely related. The UK Climate Change Commission (UKCCC) advises on how the impact of climate change will perpetuate existing health inequalities in the UK.

Recognising the potential strength in the voice of a voluntary, professional organisation like the British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin (BAPIO), the Women's Forum hosted a conference, in May 2022, focusing on the linked issues of **Health Inequalities and Climate Change**. The inspiration for the conference was the research demonstrating the interdependency of inequalities in healthcare and climate change. The conference also reached out to hear the daily experiences of minority ethnic women from the BWF.

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A sustainable conference

One of the attributes of a professional is their commitment to lifelong learning. It is as important to keep up to date with the emerging evidence in their chosen specialities, as it is to maintain clinical skills and competencies. With rising awareness of health inequalities and climate change, it is important that healthcare professionals (HCPs) learn to adapt their practice to tackle the challenges faced by disadvantaged groups and adopt sustainable healthcare practices, considering the impact on the climate. Unfortunately, equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) training and the resources needed for climate impact and sustainability in healthcare are not easily accessible. Most HCPs do not have the access to practical solutions or the relevant educational resources. Very little is taught in the current undergraduate medical curriculum. Acknowledging this knowledge gap, the BAPIO Women's Forum hopes to increase awareness and work on developing accessible resources. The conference was supported by the communications team at Milton Keynes University Hospital (MKUH).

The BWF executive was keen that the conference should run sustainably;

- working with small 'green' businesses, promoting social responsibility and access to using recycled materials.
- Committing to the philosophy of '*lift as you climb*' in providing opportunities to female HCPs, the conference paired young female conference chairs with more experienced ones to provide mentoring and support.
- Hosted at the Hotel La Tour, Milton Keynes which prides itself in being 'green' and helped to make the conference zero-waste and zero-plastic.

- Delegates wore their own work lanyards rather than creating specific ones for the conference.
- QR codes were displayed for the program to reduce paper and feedback was collected electronically.
- Delegate bags were made from jute and included carefully chosen items such as recycled wooden pens, plant pots with seeds, pencils that contained seeds, wooden pencil holder and a recycled notebook.

Social media

Leading up to the conference, the main goal of social media posts was to promote the event whilst raising awareness on the relationship between climate change and healthcare. We felt this was relevant following the burden of COVID-19 on healthcare and our environment. We marketed the event across Twitter and Instagram using #BWFClimate22 and #MKUHClimate22 hashtags. The programme was divided into four sessions with a focus quote e.g. "There is no planet B". Different shades of the colour green were used across all posts to adhere with the themes of climate change, sustainability and health.

@BAPIOWF Twitter and Instagram were frequently used as the day progressed. A tweet consisting of photos, a session quote, affiliated organisations and a key message was the format used for every speaker. This generated many retweets from their respective peers and organisations, and the conference gained traction. Fortunately, the traction spilled over to other platforms such as LinkedIn and Instagram where there was a greater following for some of our speakers.

Program

Session I - We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children

Chairs – Dr Jyothi Srinivas + Ms Jheel Vasani, medical student

- Climate change and the NHS - Our journey together' - Ms Emma Moir, Deputy Director, Greener NHS
- RCPCH Action plan for tackling Climate change -Dr Camilla Kingdon, President RCPCH
- Achieving net carbon zero in MKUH- A moral imperative- Prof Joe Harrison, CEO, Milton Keynes University Hospital

Session II- Keynote - What you do makes a difference and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make by Dr Jane Goodall

Chairs – Prof Geeta Menon, PG Dean South London, HEE and Dr Benita Florence, MKUH

- Planetary Health is Human Health- PHRC – Ms Hannah Chase, University of Oxford Medical school + Mr Jim Lee, Brighton and Sussex Medical School
- My journey on Going Green, Dr Veena Aggarwal, GPST, Chief Sustainability Officer's Clinical Fellow, NHSI/Greener Care
- The rise of eco-anxiety -Dr Catriona Mellor, Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, Bristol
- Role of procurement for a Greener NHS -Mr Tim Simmance, Regional Net Zero Lead, NHS
- Doctors for Extinction Rebellion -Dr Mangala Patil-Mead, Consultant Occupational Medicine, UK

Session III - The future will be green or not at all- Jonathon Porritt'

Chairs- Ms Mary Idowu, Assistant Director, Sustainability and Growth, BLMK ICS and Dr Sureena Goutam, Lead for Environmental Sustainability, BLMK

- I know where you bin! - Dr Zoe Rooke and Dr Christina Baithun
- For the sake of our children, The WASUP project - Prof Abdul Gatrad
- Sustainability and QIPs- Dr Rosie Spooner
- MKUH staff survey - Ms Victoria Khakua, Medical student, UBMS
- Upcycled medical PPE - Ms Linda Ball

Session IV - 'There is no Planet B'

Chair: Dr Jyothi Srinivas, Consultant Paediatrician, MKUH

- Leadership and Health Inequalities- Core20PLUSS -Dr Bola Oluwabi, GP, Director, Health Inequalities, NHSE/I
- Addressing unmet needs in Women's Health – Emeritus Prof Dame Parveen Kumar, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry.
- CHILL Air pollution and Health study' -Prof Gurch Randhawa, Professor of Diversity in Public Health Director, Institute for Health Research, University of Bedfordshire

Session V - We are all in this together

Chairs - Dr Ananta Dave, Medical Director, Lincolnshire NHS Trust and Dr Malvika Subramaniam, FY doctor

- Impact of poverty on children's' health in UK- Prof Ian Sinha, Consultant Respiratory Paediatrician, Alder Hey Children's Hospital
 - The road ahead -Inequalities in care of diabetes - Dr Shivani Misra, Consultant Physician in Diabetes and Metabolic Medicine, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust
 - Making a difference – How to be an ally -Prof Partha Kar, OBE, Consultant in Diabetes and Endocrinology, Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust. Director of Equality, Medical Workforce, NHSE.
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Key Messages

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

The meaning of the phrase is *'the world is one family'*. Considered to be the most important moral value in Indian society, this phrase was originally found in Maha Upanishad (500-1000 CE) and can be found engraved in the entrance hall of the Parliament of India. We all need to work together to address climate change as this affects all parts of the globe. While individual actions are commendable, we can truly make positive changes towards climate change when we acknowledge that collective efforts are key to success. In keeping with the Indian and BAPIO tradition, earthen lamps were lit by Dr Jyothi Srinivas and Dr JS Bamrah with the chants.

*asato mā sadgamaya,
tamaso mā jyotirgamaya,
mṛtyormā'mṛtaṃ gamaya.*

From evil lead me to good,
From darkness lead me to light,
From death lead me to immortality.

We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children

Emma Moir set the scene with the goals of a greener NHS, highlighting that climate change is a major threat to our health as well as our planet. The environment is changing, that change is accelerating, and this has direct and immediate consequences for our patients, the public and the NHS. The Greener NHS program works with NHS staff and Trusts across the country sharing ideas on how to reduce the impact on public health and the environment, save money and reach net carbon zero. In October 2020, the NHS became the world's first health service to commit to reaching carbon net zero.

Camilla Kingdon, reminded the delegates that the United Nations (November 2021) lists the *'Right of children to breathe clean air'*. Nearly 90% of the global burden of disease associated with climate change is borne by children under 5 years of age. The RCPCH declared a climate emergency in 2020 and has published a strategy for tackling this issue as a priority.

Joe Harrison, a passionate advocate for addressing climate change has led his organisation in adopting policies on energy efficiency (solar panels on roofs), reducing food

waste and supporting staff in using electric vehicles.

What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make

Medical students Hannah and Jim presented their data on the importance of education on sustainable healthcare within the medical curriculum. Almost all medical schools in the UK have signed up to the Planetary Health Report Card (PHRC) and are committed to the goals of enabling future doctors to address climate change in healthcare.

Greener NHS have introduced Clinical Fellows scheme in sustainability. Veena Aggarwal, a Sustainability fellow shared her personal contribution in this role.

Children across the world are concerned about the huge amount of waste generated every day and the effect of climate change on our world. Catriona Mellor explained her worldwide study on eco-anxiety that confirmed the stress on children and the need for us to demonstrate our commitment to addressing this issue. Inhalers in paediatrics make up a large proportion of waste with most NHS staff and parents unaware of how to dispose of it in an environment friendly manner.

Trainee doctor Zoe Rooke presented their survey findings and their collaboration with pharmacy to set up a disposal scheme in their department.

The NHS is one of the largest employers in the world with 1.4 million staff. Data from pre-pandemic 2019 states that 1.4 billion gloves were used in the NHS. This has likely more than doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tim Simmance, Regional Net Zero lead, encouraged clinicians to work with procurement departments to reduce waste generated, while considering new environment friendly materials of use in the NHS.

Doctors for Extinction Rebellion include thousands of NHS staff who highlight the climate crisis with many campaigns and action plans.

The future will be green or not at all

Medical students and Junior doctors presented on a recent MKUH staff survey that highlighted 90% of staff are concerned about the climate crisis and waste in the NHS. There was a clear need for Trusts to communicate with their staff on new developments (e.g. charging for electric cars). Staff requested easy access to information on understanding how to calculate their own carbon footprint and other relevant resources. In view of this, an electronic resource of the 6 main topics is being developed that will be shared with MKUH staff and University of Buckingham Medical School (UBMS).

Rosie Spooner, a trainee in paediatrics has completed a year as Fellow in Sustainability and gave several examples of Quality Improvement Projects (QIPs) that can be undertaken by different HCPs in the NHS.

A private entrepreneur using ocean waste to develop Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including scrubs for NHS staff explained the process and brought samples to showcase their work on developing a circular economy that reduces PPE waste. This generated quite a bit of interest and many delegates are planning to consider introducing these PPE in their Trusts including MKUH.

[Professor Gatrad](#), founder of WASSUP (World Against Single Use Plastic), has worked for the last two decades on reducing single use plastic. He developed a program to teach school children on plastic waste.

There is no Planet B

Bola Owolabi, inspired the delegates about the *Core20PLUS5* approach, which was developed to focus on 20% most deprived population by the Index of Multiple Deprivation – the ‘Core 20’ of the national population, ‘PLUS’ stood for Integrated Care System (ICS) determined groups experiencing poorer than average access, experience or outcomes from healthcare and the ‘5’ represented the clinical focus areas with the greatest opportunities to narrow the health inequity gap. These 5 areas were maternity, severe mental illness, chronic respiratory disease, early cancer diagnosis and hypertension.

Dame Parveen Kumar emphasised the need to focus on the unmet needs in women’s health and encouraged the delegates to persist towards our goal of gender equality.

Gurch Randhawa gave an overview of children's health in London and Luton (CHILL) study focusing on air pollution affecting children. The study organisers used a video message designed by children to recruit >3000 children for their project.

We are all in this together

Ian Sinha presented the evidence exploring the effect of air pollution in children leading to respiratory conditions such as asthma in the UK.

[Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah](#), who lived near the South Circular Road in Lewisham, south-east London, died in 2013. Ella was the first person in the UK to have air pollution listed as the cause of death on their death certificate. The air pollution is worse in poorer areas in developed countries adversely affecting people in low socio-economic areas.

Shivani Misra talked on the major issue of diabetes affecting certain demographics and the role of HCPs in identifying and treating these groups sooner, especially among south Asian populations in the UK (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi nationals).

Partha Kar showcased the issue of racism, colourism, and gender bias within NHS staff and the importance of speaking up and actively challenging such behaviours or culture.

Conclusion

Ramesh Mehta, President of BAPIO gave his commitment to showcase the climate crisis in all future conferences. He reiterated that the climate crisis was a health crisis and health care workers should be equipped with the knowledge of the problem and ways to reduce the impact for future generations. *‘While we can all help individually by reducing plastic waste, recycling and supporting local businesses it is really important that we collaborate with others to work together.’*

‘By polluting the oceans, not mitigating CO₂ emissions and destroying our biodiversity, we are killing our planet. Let us face it, there is no planet B.’

Emmanuel Macron, President of France

Further reading

1. <https://www.theccc.org.uk>
2. <https://www.ipcc.ch>
3. <https://ukcop26.org>
4. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/greenernhs/>
5. <https://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/suqi>
6. <https://climate.nasa.gov/causes/>
7. <https://footprint.wwf.org.uk/#/>
8. <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/nhs-in-a-nutshell/health-inequalities>
9. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities>
10. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/resources/>
11. <https://unfoundation.org/blog/post/five-facts-about-gender-equality-and-climate-change/>
12. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>
13. <https://wasupme.com>
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