Climate change continues to attract a lot of media attention. This focus intensifies during reports of heatwaves, flooding, extreme cold snaps, air pollution and when it impacts air quality and drinking water. In the healthcare sector, this adds to the vulnerability of the young, the old and people with a wide range of health conditions, as Karen Cook, Senior Manager, Sustainable Development, Lloyds Bank discusses.

There are a wide variety of ways in which GPs and practice managers can reduce the impact they have on the environment. As well as supporting a cleaner environment, a greater focus on sustainability can provide unexpected bonuses – such as driving down energy bills and reducing operating costs.

Imminent NHS reforms will see mergers and re-equippping of practices across the country, so this could be a good time for a thorough programme to review, improve and re-implement sustainability plans within a practice.

ENERGY
Creating greater energy efficiency throughout the practice can begin with carrying out a full audit of energy usage. The efficiency of lighting, heating, air-conditioning and appliances like kettles and fridges should be checked.

Measures to reduce energy usage can be surprisingly simple, and could include:
- replacing old-fashioned light bulbs with LEDs,
- fitting timers and or motion sensors to lighting and heating,
- reducing thermostat settings by one degree,
- improving the insulation of doors, windows and roof,
- opening a window instead of turning on air con or fans,
- switching off electrical equipment when it’s not being used, and
- investing in green energy, such as solar panels on the roof.

PROCUREMENT
Dialogue with suppliers about their environmental policies, and researching eco-friendly alternatives, can help decision-making to support an environmental focus. Obvious examples include:
- using stationery made from mainly recycled paper,
• replacing toxic cleaning products with ‘greener’ alternatives,
• recycling your printer toner cartridges, and
• investing in energy and water-efficient equipment.

Discussions with suppliers should also refer to the NHS Supplier Code of Conduct to ensure they themselves meet the basic requirements to continue the commercial relationship. This can be downloaded at: www.supplychain.nhs.uk

WATER
As with energy, carrying out an audit of water usage can support a greater sustainability focus. “Quick wins” might include:
• fixing leaking taps and pipes,
• water displacement devices on toilets to lower water usage,
• not overfilling the kettle when staff make tea or coffee, and
• collecting rainwater in butts to water plants or grass.

TRANSPORT
Alternatives to a reliance on car travel should be considered and should be promoted across the organisation. These can include:
• using teleconferencing for meetings,
• setting up a car-share scheme for staff, and
• providing opportunities for cycle storage – and showers for cyclists.

ENGAGEMENT
Sustainability should be something everyone within the practice and organisation is involved in, so try to make sure staff and patients are also included in sustainability plans. This can include:
• educating staff on the environmental and financial benefits of being sustainable,
• using noticeboards, newsletters, intranet and other outlets to promote sustainability,
• adding “Sustainability” as a regular agenda item in meetings to keep it front of mind, and
• getting together with other local GPs to share ideas and collectively drive change.

Use our free online Sustainability Planning Tool to create an action plan focusing on a wide range of topics. There’s also a guide and templates to help you write an environmental policy and some free posters to download and display within your premises. To find out more visit www.lloydsbank.com/sustainability

SUPPORT FOR PATIENTS
There is a wealth of information that patients, especially vulnerable people, should be considering to help protect themselves in certain extreme situations.

For example, elderly people should be made aware of ways to cope with very hot or very cold weather, while patients with respiratory health issues should be aware of the impact of different levels of smog and air pollution, and how to reduce its effect in extreme conditions.

WASTE AWARENESS
One of the largest contributors to waste is paper, but this can be reduced very simply by distributing documents electronically when possible.

For dangerous waste, staff need to be aware of the right processes for the disposal of hazardous waste such as radioactive substances to ensure it doesn’t impact on the environment.

RISK
All practices need to be aware of the current environmental regulations and what needs to be done to avoid a potential fine. As well as ensuring that respective staff know what permits, licenses and training are needed to meet the legislative requirements of certain situations, the whole practice should also have a clear emergency response plan for major incidents.

Please contact us if you would like this information in an alternative format such as Braille, large print or audio.