

# PCRS White Paper for Greener Respiratory Healthcare: A Summary



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This document has been produced to provide a summary of the full PCRS White Paper for Greener Respiratory Healthcare. It aims to provide primary care respiratory clinicians with a more concise, 'bite-sized' resource for understanding and actioning greener respiratory healthcare. The full document can be accessed for more detailed information about sustainable strategies and approaches. The original white paper was produced following a round table meeting with all key stakeholders (patients, patient organisations, clinicians, commissioners, NHS England etc) in order to call for urgent action and change.

# Setting the scene

The Primary Care Respiratory Society (PCRS) believe that by working together we can achieve more environmentally friendly respiratory healthcare.



We identified six key areas that require action by individual healthcare professionals and commissioners, professional organisations and the pharmaceutical industry:

1



**Become knowledgeable** about the impact of respiratory healthcare on the environment.

2



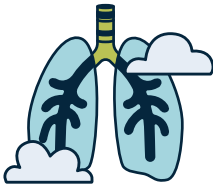
Ensure every patient receives **early and accurate diagnosis** and the **most appropriate treatment** for them to achieve optimal control of their respiratory condition.

3



**Educate colleagues and patients** about the environmental impact of respiratory healthcare.

4



**Advocate for clean air** by supporting strategies to reduce air pollution at a personal level as well as part of clinical practice.

5



Consider and actively **seek ways to minimise the environmental impact of respiratory healthcare** without compromising quality of care.

6



**Collaborate** with patient groups, professional bodies and the pharmaceutical industry to tackle climate change together.

### Through our Greener Healthcare initiative, PCRS will

- Seek to raise awareness and advocate for proactive strategies to reduce the impact of the environment on respiratory health and of respiratory healthcare on the environment.
- Enable all those involved in the delivery of respiratory healthcare to deliver care that is kinder to the environment, ensures quality of care through early and accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment that ensure optimal symptom control.
- Educate colleagues and patients about the environmental impact of respiratory healthcare and how they can reduce this without compromising quality of care or symptom control.

PCRS is also calling on healthcare commissioners and leaders, industry stakeholders and environmental groups to work together to identify solutions, strategies and treatments that promote greener healthcare.

# Practice level action

Sir Simon Stevens, previous NHS Chief Executive, stated:

*“With almost 700 people dying of potentially avoidable deaths due to air pollution every week we are facing a health emergency as well as a climate emergency. While the NHS is already a world leader in sustainability, as the biggest employer in this country comprising nearly a tenth of the UK economy, we’re both part of the problem and part of the solution”.*

As businesses, healthcare professionals and citizens of the planet, we need to consider changes we can make both personally, and as a practice, to improve our carbon footprint.

**PCRS resources that may support practice level action on greener healthcare include:**

**Greener Healthcare Hub:**  
home to all PCRS's greener healthcare resources

**Greener Healthcare Calendar of Action:** small steps of change you can do each day

**A Whole Practice Approach to Greener Healthcare:** video

Switching to DPIs and Minimising MDIs: **Inhaler podcasts**

## Shorter term, quick wins

### As a practice



- Turn off computers overnight
- Encourage safe disposal schemes for used inhalers
- Increase social prescribing and recommending non-pharmaceutical treatments
- Discuss plant-based diets or meat free Mondays with patients and staff
- Set up green walking for health and consider NHS Forest ideas
- Introduce a no idling zone for patients driving to appointments

### Working with your community

- Compost waste
- Donate shredded waste to animal sanctuaries
- Promote sustainable travel options for staff and patients for getting to work/appointments
- Encouraging walking/ cycling to work
- Introduction of E-bikes



## Longer term, aspirations

### Thinking bigger



- Solar panels
- Practice insulation
- Using ethical bank and energy providers
- Consider completing a greener practice assessment such as the [GP carbon calculator](#).
- Electric car charging points
- Having a practice electric 'pool' car for home visiting

# Prevention



**Central to all respiratory health is the prevention of disease where possible. Enabling people to live healthy, disease-free lives is better for the person, better for the environment and better for the health economy of the country.**

Whilst we know the following considerations will have a positive impact on lung health, they also benefit cardiovascular health, reduce the likelihood of many cancers and improve people's general well-being.

- Improving education and understanding in healthcare professionals and patients about indoor and outdoor air quality.
- Preventing tobacco use and vaping in non-smokers, especially children and young people.
- Where smoking is established, treating tobacco dependency.
- Being aware of the effects of poverty on respiratory disease. Poor quality housing, exposure to higher levels of air pollution, the potential of poor nutrition, higher levels of tobacco exposure through smoking and/or passive smoking, and difficulty accessing good quality healthcare can all be causative factors for respiratory disease either independently or collectively.
- Avoiding deconditioning, maintaining and improving activity.

## **PCRS resources that may support practice level action on greener healthcare:**

### **Health Inequalities Hub**

Home to all PCRSs health inequalities resources

### **Tobacco Dependency Hub**

Home to all PCRSs tobacco dependency resources

### **Reducing Indoor and Outdoor Air Pollution in Healthcare Settings**

### **Movement for Health**

Animation on promoting exercise and wellbeing in patients

# Diagnosis

## Timely diagnosis, greener care: A win for health and environment

Accurate and timely diagnosis is crucial for achieving greener healthcare.

Misdiagnosis leads to unnecessary issues such as repeated consultations, inappropriate inhaler prescriptions, and unplanned hospital admissions.

Good healthcare should be green, and green healthcare should be good – both should work together.

### We're familiar with common diagnostic challenges:

- Is it viral-induced wheeze or paediatric asthma?
- Is it adult-onset asthma or COPD?
- Could it be another condition, such as lung cancer or bronchiectasis?
- Should we try an inhaler first to see if it helps?

These dilemmas can be difficult, but failing to address them promptly often results in patients undergoing multiple treatment regimens – posing risks to their health and harm to the environment.

Risk stratification and proactive reviews are essential to ensure that initial diagnoses are revisited and refined if necessary. Primary care is well-suited for this, offering good accessibility and close follow-up.

**PCRS has several resources on diagnosis. Start with these and then visit the [PCRS website](#) to access more:**

[Diagnostic testing](#)

[Consensus guide to peak flow](#)



# Future of healthcare and consultation



## Remote consults, real results, reducing footprints

While digital and remote healthcare cannot fully replace traditional face-to-face consultations, it is expected to play an increasingly significant role in respiratory care. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of telemedicine, and we are now seeing the advantages and challenges it presents in primary respiratory medicine. When used strategically and with careful planning, technology such as video consultations and remote monitoring can greatly improve healthcare efficiency.



## Reduced patient travel

Remote healthcare is environmentally beneficial as it decreases the need for patient travel, which accounts for 5% of the NHS's carbon footprint. This is especially impactful in rural areas, where patients often must travel long distances using private transport.



## Digital patient education materials

Patient education can be effectively provided through digital formats if it is both acceptable and accessible to the patient. Digital materials help conserve non-renewable resources such as paper and plastic.



## Lower energy consumption and room requirements

Remote consultations can decrease energy consumption by reducing the need for heating, lighting, and maintaining physical consultation rooms. With many GP practices facing a shortage of consultation rooms and a growing number of allied healthcare professionals, remote consultations offer a practical solution. This approach alleviates space constraints while increasing patient accessibility to care.



## Increased efficiency and fewer missed appointments

Remote consultations can significantly reduce the number of missed appointments. Many of our NHS patients experience challenges attending in-person appointments at specific times, but remote consultations offer more flexibility. Also, missed phone or video consultations are generally less disruptive than missed in-person appointments.

For more information on how digital technology can support your provision of high-quality healthcare, see the [PCRS Digital Technology hub](#).



# Inhalers and prescribing

## Right medicine in the right form

The best inhaler is one that the patient will use effectively. Unused inhalers contribute to wastage, including plastic, propellants, and distribution costs.

It is crucial to ensure that patients are prescribed the appropriate medication (the right treatment for their condition) at the lowest effective dose to minimise waste.

See PCRS's [inhaler devices hub](#) for information on ensuring the best inhaler for your patients.

There is also information and advice available on inhalers and their correct use via the [Asthma and Lung UK](#) and [Right Breathe](#) websites.

## Carbon footprint of inhalers

When it comes to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, not all inhalers are equal.

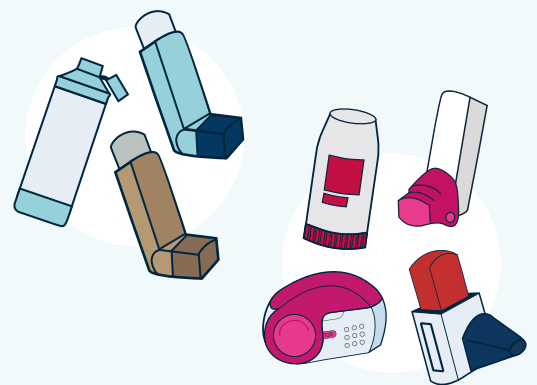
Pressurised metered-dose inhalers (pMDIs) account for 3% of the NHS's carbon footprint, making it important to consider their environmental impact<sup>1</sup>.

- Can the patient use dry powder inhalers (DPIs) or soft-mist inhalers (SMIs)?
- If not, can they use pMDIs with a lower CO<sub>2</sub> impact?
- New propellants in pMDIs are an exciting, innovative area of development to watch.

Starting an inhaler for the first time is an excellent opportunity to introduce an environmentally friendly option. However, switching inhalers should be done with caution to ensure patient adherence and efficacy.

See the PCRS resources on [Tailoring Inhaler Choice](#) for support on the carbon footprint of inhalers.

<sup>1</sup> NHS Business Services Authority. Respiratory - Carbon Impact Dashboard. Available [here](#).



## Electronic prescriptions

Wherever possible, electronic prescriptions should be used to streamline the process and reduce paper waste.

# Personalised care

## Personalised plans, empowered patients

Keeping patients out of hospital is not only beneficial for their health but also for the environment. Personalised care facilitates patient concordance by actively involving patients in decision-making and improving the understanding of their condition and management plan.

For any “trial” treatments, it is important to give clear guidance on the next steps if the treatment is ineffective.

Planned or patient-initiated follow-ups are crucial before solidifying the regimen as part of the personalised care package.

Supporting self-management is also essential. Empowering patients to maintain their fitness and physical health supports sustainability.

Supported COPD  
Self-management  
Resource

Asthma Action Plans  
Podcast

Movement for Health  
Animation



## Empower through choice

Offering patients the choice between paper or digital copies of their care plans is a simple way to personalise care while being environmentally conscious.

Raising patient awareness of the environmental impact of inhalers is another way to empower them to make informed choices about their inhaler options.

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