

Jo Churchill MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

14 October 2020

Dear Jo,

Re: Sustainable and environmentally friendly general practice

I write regarding steps that we can take, even as we continue to battle the pandemic, to address climate change, which remains one of the most important issues of current times, particularly in terms of protecting the long-term health of the nation. Indeed, there are many lessons that we can learn from our response to the current COVID-19 crisis that can help us rise to the challenges of climate change.

I am therefore seeking your support for the creation of a 'green fund' for general practice to allow GPs to access resources that will lead the NHS towards sustainable carbon neutrality.

We welcomed the commitments towards carbon neutrality contained in the *Delivering a net zero NHS* report and believe these to be achievable goals if we choose now to make focused investments in areas that can make a real difference. Tackling the general practice carbon footprint will be an important part of achieving net zero and we have created an action plan that can help to put environmental responsibility and sustainability at the heart of the way general practice works.

Building on our learning from COVID-19, where an enforced increase in remote working and consultations has shown us that we can work effectively in different ways, improve access and convenience for patients and also help to tackle climate change at the same time. Alongside the green fund proposal, we have identified areas which rely on multi-organisation collaboration and I seek your commitment that the government and the NHS will work with us towards achieving these necessary, practical changes. I have included an overview of these changes below.

Green Fund

In our recent publication, [Sustainable and environmentally friendly general practice](#), we outline how a Green Fund for general practice would help GPs to make significant, lasting progress towards achieving net zero. Existing initiatives, such as the incentive to move patients towards low carbon inhalers, are a step in the right direction and need to be brought under a dedicated, wide-reaching programme which facilitates practice-level analytical activities and benchmarking. Practices must be enabled to make sustainability part of their day-to-day processes and their decision making, and this is where toolkits like [Green Impact for Health](#) could be transformative. The toolkit provides GPs with

Chief executive officer: Tom Grinyer



an extensive action list for sustainable improvements covering business, premises and clinical domains. Investment in this toolkit through a green fund would allow for further development of the clinical domains and help GPs to dedicate time and resources towards a set of clear and achievable aims.

The green fund could help to fund a diverse range of actions, from providing the hardware, software and training for remote working, through to low carbon energy provision and the recycling of general practice consumables. The fund could also be used to develop learning and training modules to improve carbon-literacy and embed knowledge throughout primary care.

Wider collaboration towards carbon neutrality

Estimates of the carbon footprint in general practices suggest that between 65% and 90% is associated with pharmaceutical prescribing. We welcome the commitment in *Delivering a net zero NHS* to move away from using suppliers who do not share the NHS's carbon commitment, but action is needed now to ensure that GPs and other clinicians can make informed decisions about the carbon-footprint of the medicines they prescribe. All medicines should be labelled (on the RAG rating system) to identify their carbon footprint. This would involve the pharmaceutical industry undertaking an independently validated methodology to assess the total environmental impact of all medications. Reducing unnecessary prescribing is a further route to carbon reduction, and this can be facilitated through the incorporation of validated deprescribing tools into the general practice operating system.

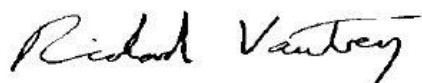
Working differently

Urgent practical changes introduced to respond to COVID-19 have shown that we can work differently and safely with the added benefit of reducing the NHS's environmental impact. Alongside the environmental benefits of reduced patient and staff travel, the current pandemic saw us work together in the relaxation of rules in secondary care and care homes which dictate that any medicines that have left the pharmacy cannot be given to another patient, even if they are unopened. Following a review of existing regulations, this relaxation could be extended to primary care and community pharmacy, allowing pharmacists and clinicians to make use of medicines that are returned in unused packaging and providing a significant reduction in medicines waste.

I hope you will take the opportunity to consider [our full set of proposals](#) and the idea of a green fund for general practice. While our proposals are designed to reduce the carbon footprint, it is notable how often they equate to making better use of technology and working more efficiently. GPs and our practice teams are serious about working towards carbon-neutrality, but they require the tools, funding and regulatory changes to make it happen.

I look forward to your reply. If you have any questions or to arrange a meeting to discuss this issue further please contact Gemma Hopkins on 020 7383 6287 or ghopkins@bma.org.uk.

Yours sincerely



Dr Richard Vautrey
Chair, BMA General Practitioners Committee