

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Role of Sustainability Education Within Dermatological Surgery in the United Kingdom

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Dear editor,

Sustainability recognises the limited planetary resources and is characterised by being able to sufficiently meet the needs of the current population without compromising future generations. The most recent iteration of the General Medical Council (United Kingdom) 'Outcome for Graduates' document required newly qualified doctors to have knowledge of sustainable healthcare (General Medical Council, 2018). Medical education is a key pillar in empowering the medical workforce to recognise the sustainability of the health services they provide and build competencies to reconfigure services and care pathways that will be resilient to the effects of climate change.

Dermatology surgery contributes to climate change through the direct use of resources to undertake surgeries and the indirect consequence of carbon footprint from the associated supply chain and patient care pathway. The role of dermatological surgeons extends

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beyond patient care and into management, education, leadership and quality improvement. In this letter, we reflect upon the potential role of medical education within skin surgery sustainability and report on the activities of the British Society of Dermatological Surgery's (BSDS) newly formed sustainability subgroup.

Medical education is multifaceted; it includes addressing teaching, facilitating learning, assessment of learning, educational scholarship, management and leadership (Academy of Medical Educators, 2021). System-wide integration of sustainability education could begin at the level of the undergraduate curriculum through to postgraduate training. This can be developed to include the following: integrating sustainability learning into the curriculum, the impact of climate change on disease, introducing leadership roles (campus sustainability

Table 1. Educational opportunities in environmental sustainability in dermatological surgery

| Educational Opportunities | Stakeholder |
|---|--------------------|
| A wider, exploratory investigation into the understanding of environmental sustainability in dermatology surgery should be undertaken. | Educators |
| Institutions such as the British Association of Dermatologists and Medical Schools Council should establish sustainability policies and guidelines, and develop targeted campaigns across platforms to monitor and combat climate change. | Institutions |
| Integration of sustainability learning and educational opportunities embedded into undergraduate, postgraduate and specialty training curriculums. | Institutions |
| Clinicians should be trained and reminded of professional standards related to sustainability, using a structured approach such as integration into clinical junior doctor competencies. | Clinicians |
| Clinicians should be supported in learning the common principles of sustainable surgical practice in order to future-proof the profession and lead on new initiatives and research, and encourage widespread dissemination of the research/initiatives. | Clinicians |

champions), student-selected components, and learning to be more sustainable in the healthcare setting and wider community. For example, the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare currently offers 4–8 weeks of elective placement for students to gain experience in green initiatives (Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, 2022). In addition to continuing professional development, postgraduate clinicians could benefit from experiential learning of sustainability practices such as the adoption of the Royal College of Physicians' sustainability in quality improvement framework (SusQI) (Mortimer et al., 2018) as quality improvement projects, enrol into higher degrees related to sustainable healthcare, or apply to undertake sustainability scholarships and fellow schemes. Table 1 summarises the range of educational opportunities the authors have identified in environmental sustainability in dermatological surgery.

Whilst there are published articles discussing environmental sustainability in dermatological surgery, there remains a lack of robust research and evidence-based professional guidance on this matter (Allwright and Abbott, 2020). Furthermore, accountability is



Figure 1. BDS sustainability subgroup aims

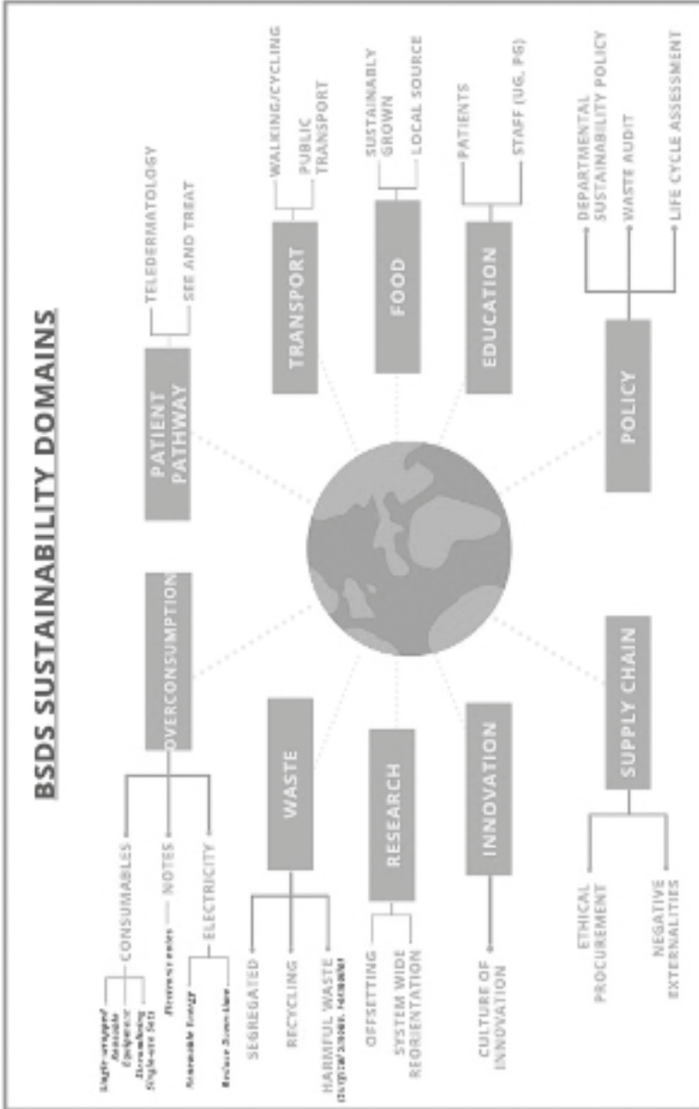


Figure 2. The BSDS sustainability domains for combating climate change

paramount in achieving appropriate, co-ordinated, sustainable medical education in dermatologic surgery. The BSDS's sustainability subgroup, formed in June 2021, aims to spearhead innovative interventions and develop national guidelines to mitigate the environmental impact of dermatology surgery, through working alongside key stakeholders, patients and colleagues (Figure 1). Sustainability domains have been devised by the subgroup (Figure 2) which will provide an opportunity for curriculum mapping and development to be carried out at undergraduate and postgraduate level, as well as providing an opportunity to review evidence and opportunities for audit and research relevant to sustainable healthcare.

Ultimately, dermatological surgery service provision is vast and multifaceted, requiring widespread bottom-up system-wide integration of sustainability education from undergraduate to postgraduate medical education. The advent of the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) and initiatives such as 'Net Zero NHS' demonstrates that dermatologists, in addition to healthcare professionals alike, should act as leaders in this domain. Overall, dermatologists should hold high professional standards, learn and collaborate with colleagues as we adopt a flexible, evidence-based approach to environmentally friendly dermatological surgery using medical education as a conduit to do so.

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