

Dr Kirsty Beckett
Sustainability Fellow 2022-23

[\(Aspiring Leaders Fellowship - Coventry & Warwickshire\)](#)

Background

I qualified as a GP in 2016 as part of the Windsor VTS scheme, having completed my medical degree at the University of Southampton in 2011 and subsequently my foundation years in Buckinghamshire. I then moved back to Warwickshire and at the beginning of the fellowship had been working as a salaried GP in South Warwickshire for 6 years.

I was very excited to be successful in my application to become a Sustainability Fellow as I have always been an advocate for the environment in my personal life. I had been following with interest the efforts of individuals across the NHS nationally to make the health service more sustainable and felt the time was definitely right for more engagement with this aim locally. I was also keen to broaden my outlook and take advantage of opportunities for networking and leadership within the wider system, rather than just my own practice.

I was however also somewhat apprehensive as this particular fellowship was new with no precedent in terms of preexisting projects to get involved with. I was pleased to be able to work closely in several areas with and have the support of Dr Poppy Roberts, my counterpart as Sustainability Fellow for 2022-23. I also came to appreciate more and more throughout the year that sustainability is very closely interrelated to addressing health inequalities, as the effects of the climate crisis, air pollution and environmental instability are disproportionately felt by the most deprived and vulnerable in society.

Projects

1. Training Delivery and Sustainability Advocacy: Sustainability Teaching at Protected Learning Time Session

As one of the first employed advocates of sustainability across the system, I was keen to use the platform to spread awareness of greener issues and encourage colleagues to take small practical steps that would be manageable with a busy clinical workload. I secured the opportunity early on to host a PLT session dedicated to sustainability in January 2022, for North Warwickshire, and for the first hour of a virtual 'Lunch and Learn' session also to the Coventry area. I presented an introduction to the topic while we also secured external speakers from NHS England, the Clean Air Network, the RCGP and pharmacy colleagues across the system. We felt the afternoon had been a success, with 157 attending virtually and 87% saying their practice would change as a result of the session.

I am keen to be able to replicate this for other areas within Coventry and Warwickshire and we have been offered another PLT session to present at in February 2024.

As it is clear that one of the greatest impacts primary care clinicians can have on our overall carbon footprint is by reforming asthma care, it was suggested that a helpful intervention might also be to arrange a face-to-face asthma training for practice nurses, which is felt to have been lacking over the

pandemic and which would also discuss greener options for asthma care. I have had conversations with various individuals in trying to organise this, but we are currently still exploring funding options.

2. Greener Practice Coventry & Warwickshire

I became aware of the Greener Practice movement after attending a course early on in the fellowship, as a national primary care movement whose members have been extremely influential at pushing the green agenda nationally. I attended several meetings of the Birmingham and Solihull branch, but it seemed right that we create a branch for Coventry and Warwickshire to try to affect change more locally. We achieved this after liaising with the national committee and we now have a small but enthusiastic membership participating in quarterly meetings and on the circulation list for our newsletter of local and national opportunities and Whatsapp group. Our first meeting was attended by one of the founders of Greener Practice who is a GP practising in Sheffield, and latterly our members have chosen to have more of a collaborative meeting to enable local conversations. The aim is to share ideas of what has worked to improve sustainability practically, at a practice level, and work together where we can. It has been very encouraging to see a wide variety of professionals represented at our meetings, from medical students to pharmacists to practice managers, working in Coventry and both North and South Warwickshire. We also have a small section on both the Training Hub website and national Greener Practice website dedicated to our group.

The virtual meetings have also led to connections with other interested parties such as the sustainability society at Warwick Medical School.

As a Greener Practice co-chair of a locality group, I have also been offered other training opportunities, for example I attended a virtual training on how to maximise the effectiveness of online meetings that I found genuinely groundbreaking and definitively practice changing for managing my own Greener Practice meetings. It has been inspiring to participate in this network of committed individuals from many different professional groups and areas of the country who are welcoming and keen to share ideas and support newcomers. As such, I plan to continue my involvement on an ongoing basis, perhaps in a joint leadership role or as a rolling chair.

3. Greener Delivery Board Attendance

As Sustainability Fellows, we have been attending bimonthly meetings of the ICS' Greener Delivery Board which has offered a valuable opportunity to discover more about what is happening at the local trusts to try to further the sustainability agenda. This has afforded opportunities to collaborate with different people and also, crucially, has meant that a primary care voice is present for the first time in this forum. What has been highlighted to me is that individuals working in secondary care are often not aware of the challenges unique to primary care, and so it is extremely valuable to form trusted working relationships in order to be able to work together on projects, share learning and avoid unnecessary duplication. The experience has given me more confidence in approaching colleagues working in similar areas to form these working relationships that may be mutually beneficial, as well as presenting myself at virtual meetings, contributing to discussion and reporting back.

4. Collaboration with Warwickshire County Council and Coventry City Council

Both Warwickshire County Council and Coventry City Council have sustainability firmly on their agenda for upcoming years and I found that they were keen to collaborate and seek views from other interested parties. In February I participated in a focus group aimed at informing Warwickshire County Council's sustainability strategy for stakeholders in the care sector. I was also invited to review and comment on the document produced by Coventry City Council outlining their sustainability strategy and have had several productive meetings with the sustainability team at Coventry City Council through which I have been introduced to other work via the council and third sector organisations in the sustainability sphere, such as Garden Organic and the Sustainable Food Places Network (Coventry is currently applying for a Bronze award under this scheme). In addition, I have been liaising with the social prescribing team across the area to try to boost awareness in Primary Care of our ability to refer patients who are vulnerable to the effects of energy poverty to a scheme for energy advice and retrofitting of energy efficient ways to heat their homes, provided by Eon.

Towards the end of the year, I was invited to take part in a podcast series produced by Warwickshire County Council called Sustainable Warwickshire, which to date has had episodes dealing with Biodiversity, sustainable transport, energy, climate change adaptations, the circular economy, engaging children with nature and now healthcare, talking to people involved in these areas locally about what is happening and how local residents can help and be involved in the solutions. I was interviewed along with one of the sustainability officers at SWFT aiming to outline how healthcare providers and patients can work together to make the care they are receiving, more sustainable.

5. RCGP Net Zero Advisor Role

Early on in 2023, I was excited to see that the RCGP was also beginning to become more involved publicly in the issue of climate change and had advertised for GPs to apply to be trained as Net Zero Carbon Advisors to go into practices, complete a short audit and make recommendations. I applied successfully for this role and completed the training in March, meaning that I am now also part of a network of Net Zero Advisors who can be contracted by the RCGP to advise and support practices on how to lessen their carbon footprint.

CPD

In addition to the opportunities, I have outlined so far via Greener Practice and the RCGP, and the excellent introductory course I attended on Sustainable Primary Care provided by the Centre for Sustainable Healthcare, I also attended a leadership programme facilitated by the King's Fund entitled 'Personal Impact and Influence'.

This was attended by a diverse range of healthcare professionals in leadership roles but was an invaluable chance away from the daily pressures of clinical care to interact with others in the healthcare system to understand more about myself and how I am perceived by others- and how I can be more mindful of this and change it when needed.

The course was spread over 5 days, so was quite intense, but has definitely left me with a deeper understanding of my professional relationships and how to be more mindful of my own impact and the influences I can have.

Reflections

Overall, I am so grateful to have been given the opportunity to undertake this fellowship- I feel it has made me so much more aware of systems locally as well as the inspiring work that goes on both at a local and national level in grassroots organisations like Greener Practice, that is easy to miss in the day-to-day routine of clinical pressures, but that genuinely adds a new energy to my primary care work. Having a legitimate role as an Aspiring Leadership Fellow has given me the confidence to approach and work with system leaders who I would probably otherwise never have made contact with. As a result now I have a much better idea of what is going on in my local area, who to contact with an idea and how I can personally have an impact. In a way, it is a shame that the Fellowship is now finishing as I feel in a much better position than at the beginning of the year to initiate projects that will have a lasting impact for local sustainability- but the end of the Fellowship does not have to mean the end of my networking and advocacy for greener practice generally!

Personally, there have been other lessons as well across the year, such as the value of networking and reaching out to others who may be able to help with tasks or problems rather than just struggling with them alone, and of patience in waiting for projects to come to fruition but also trying to keep track of a number of different threads when there are several potential projects on the go! I am still passionate about sustainability and intend to remain involved in Greener Practice over the longer term. I am excited about what we have achieved so far as Greener fellows and the potential of our successors to develop this further with the benefit of the foundations we have built and ongoing support whenever useful! I am sure that the experience of the Fellowship will benefit me in other countless ways as I develop my career in the future.