

Dr Poppy Roberts

Sustainability Fellow 2022-23

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

Background

My ALF fellowship has been a highlight of my professional life. Working on a topic I feel passionately about, working with inspiring professionals throughout our system, and being given the time and support needed to develop my own skills has been immensely rewarding and satisfying. I hope I have contributed to the beginnings of a movement that will grow.

I qualified as a GP in 2018 and became a salaried GP at Warwick Gates in 2020. I soon realised I was interested in healthcare design, and would discuss ways to improve practice with the partners at my surgery. I was offered the chance to be joint PCN CD for Leamington South and took this role from April 2021 to June 2022. This was an enormously steep learning curve, I gained a huge amount of knowledge and contacts, but did find the breadth and intensity of the role demanding. I knew to be an effective leader in future I needed to develop, and the ALF sustainability fellowship offered me the perfect opportunity to do this in a supported safe environment with access to mentoring and peer support.

Projects

System partners at all levels have been keen to develop their own sustainability plans, and I have worked with, connected and influenced numerous teams. I'll detail the specifics, but would reflect that one of the key aspects of this role was providing a hub in a wheel, connecting interested people, advocating for change and sharing best practice.

Early on I engaged with the national Greener Practice group, and continually searched for examples of successful change from other regions. System level work began by representing primary care at the ICB's Greener Delivery Board. This forum led to two projects on inhaler prescribing, one with UHCW, and another with the medicine optimisation team. We analysed our inhaler prescribing at ICB, place and PCN level, and made changes to Optimise Rx promoting low carbon inhalers to prescribers. We should see the changes reflected in prescribing trends later this year.

The LMC is an anchor organisation and I met with them early on to understand their views on sustainability. They were very supportive, and in time, I drafted a conference motion that was submitted by our local chapter. Sadly the motion did not get picked for debate, but nevertheless I hope that awareness was raised. The work gave me valuable insights into the LMC's structure and helped to build a relationship with members, as I was also given an opportunity to speak about sustainability in primary care.

Interest has been sparked in South Warwickshire place, and the local federation have appointed their own sustainability champion, and are drafting a green plan. I have been able to guide this work and connect them with other federations across the country with similar aims. I also contributed a practical proposal, to spend their surplus on energy efficiency measures for practices. This was presented to the shareholders and no final decision has been reached yet.

Going back to Greener Practice, I helped Kirsty set up our local chapter and we have established regular meetings and newsletters, with around 50 people on our mailing list. These meetings always bring me an upswell of inspiration and positivity and I know this group will continue to thrive, and I plan to continue my involvement with this network. As part of this network, I contributed to a national campaign raising awareness of the health impacts of air pollution, and travelled to Westminster in June to present our argument to MP's at a briefing ahead of a reading of the Clean Air Bill.

Nationally, I've been to CQC workshops regarding the upcoming inclusion of sustainability in new inspection frameworks. This is a huge shift, and reflects the increasing formalisation of sustainability within the healthcare system. I hope this will trigger more interest in sustainability from practice managers, and that our local Greener Practice chapter will be available to guide and inspire. Within my own PCN I have formed a "green team" of interested staff, and we are presenting to our local practice managers next month regarding the sustainability requirement and how we might work together to make meaningful changes without a big workload burden.

Locally, I have been involved with clinical education, helping to host a lunchtime PLT for C&W and an afternoon session for South Warwickshire. The feedback was good with the majority of delegates saying they would change their practice as a result of our session.

CPD

Throughout the year I've used my CPD budget to develop my knowledge and leadership skills. The main course was "Strategic Leadership for Healthcare" hosted by UCL. The insights into my own leadership strengths and weaknesses are already proving useful, as well as the practical skills in strategic planning. I am sure I will be a more resilient future leader after taking this course.

Other CPD included attending a sustainability in primary care course early on which gave me a good grounding for the year, and some valuable contacts. A workshop in behavioural change management helped me understand the concept of "choice architecture", which is vital when trying to change ways of working. I have booked further CPD courses in communication and presentation skills, and a course in creative writing. This is because I've realised engaging people with sustainability requires story telling skills; you need to paint a positive vision of a better future.

It is invaluable to have protected and paid time to commit to these training opportunities, which I would not have been able to undertake without the fellowship. When I reflect back on my time as a PCN CD, I realise I was often reactive to operational demands, rather than being proactive and having a long term strategy. I left the job feeling unsure if I would want to pursue future leadership roles. Having these training opportunities during my ALF year has taught me both the value of strategy and some practical skills and given me my confidence back

Reflections

Dr Kirsty Beckett and I were in the unique position of being the first sustainability fellows, so it is perhaps not surprising that I feel the work we have done is only just beginning. Twelve months is not a long time. The sustainability fellowships have been crucial in sowing the seeds of sustainable healthcare throughout C&W and I believe we will see interest and activity grow. I've gained personally from the fellowship, with more confidence in my abilities as a leader. I hope to continue to lead on primary care sustainability within

the C&W healthcare system, alongside my clinical work. This will start by contributing regarding sustainability to a general practice strategic planning group with the Primary Care Collaborative. In other areas, I've been invited by the University of Warwick to be a panel member for an academic research piece on "GP Net Zero". I've also agreed to present at NHS Midlands Green Week on leadership within sustainability, and I will continue to work with the Greener Practice network, co-chairing our local group. As a side role, I have applied for a system leadership role in community diagnostics, to which I believe I can bring operation skills and vision for truly integrated community based care.

I leave the year feeling enthusiastic about my career as a GP, and with a long-term interest in leadership roles. The balance between personal contact with patients, and the creative thinking of system planning will keep me energised and engaged. I've been asked to reflect on if I would recommend this role. The answer is an unequivocal yes. I would absolutely recommend the ALF programme and feel it brings a great benefit both to individuals and the wider system. As we develop General Practice into neighbourhood teams, we need GP's to confidently contribute to the changes, and programmes like ALF give a valuable opportunity to develop those skills.