

Introduction to climate change, lab sustainability and pathology

Bulletin Editor Professor Angharad Davies introduces the theme of this issue

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Late last year I attended 2 excellent events: NHS England's Pathology Transformation and Green NHS symposium, 'How Green Is Your Lab?' – hosted in the College – and the College's International Pathology Day virtual event on planetary health. These really gave me pause for thought on what we can and should be doing in pathology to tackle the climate crisis; this is theme of this issue. For more information about the 'How Green Is Your Lab?' event, read [Dr Rajeka Lazarus's reflections and key take-home messages](#).

Dr Claire Gordon, Consultant in Microbiology and Infectious Diseases at the UK Health Security Agency's (UKHSA) Rare and Imported Pathogens Laboratory, [introduces the concept of 'wicked problems'](#) – problems of extreme complexity, which implicate numerous and conflicting stakeholders, and where efforts to act may only, at best, mitigate but not solve the issue. Climate change is an example of a wicked problem (as indeed is another College priority, antimicrobial resistance). Dr Gordon also details the expanding range of infectious diseases and considers the running of sustainable pathology services.

Professor Virginia Murray, Head of Global Disaster Risk Reduction at UKHSA, explores the [impact of climate change on health](#); Sheri Scott, Institute of Biomedical Science Council Member, looks at the impact of pathology services on the environment and shares [practical strategies](#) that we can all implement in our labs to help us to achieve more sustainable and greener services.

The College itself has also been working on its own sustainability strategy for some time now. Our [CEO Daniel Ross reports](#) on what steps have been taken so far and what further steps are planned.

Case studies

Major change often calls for innovation. [Jo Walsh and Lisa Vipond of the Open Skies Cornwall project provide a clear and exciting example](#) of doing things differently – scoping the use of drones to transport samples to laboratories in rural and remote areas. Meanwhile, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals have introduced an audit scheme to develop and maintain their laboratory services’ sustainability – [Dr Rob Shorten shares their experience](#).

Wider perspectives

Of course pathology is but one small part of this huge and complex picture. Our final pair of themed articles consider wider perspectives in sustainability beyond pathology – Dr Shireen Kassam, Consultant Haematologist and founder of Plant-Based Health Professionals UK, [explains the benefits of plant-based diets](#) for the planet and individuals alike, while Professor Sergei Shubin, Professor in Human Geography and Migration, considers [lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic](#) regarding planning for uncertainty, mental health and collective action as applied to the climate emergency.

I will sign off by returning full circle to Dr Claire Gordon’s reminder that it is in the nature of a wicked problem that there is no one solution. As she explains, it may be difficult to see how tiny changes on our part – preventing an unnecessary test request here, rationalising transport arrangements there – can make a difference. Pathology alone, of course, cannot solve the climate crisis, but that is the very essence of a wicked problem. Instead, we must all aim for a series of small wins that add up over time – and that can make a difference.

Meet the author



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