



19 January 2021

The Right Honourable Jacinda Ardern
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The Honourable Stuart Nash
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The Honourable Andrew Little
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The Honourable James Shaw
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Director-General of Health
Dr Ashley Bloomfield
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Kia ora koutou katoa

I am writing as the President of the New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists (NZSA). The NZSA is a professional medical education society, which represents over 700 medical anaesthetists in New Zealand. We facilitate and promote education and research into anaesthesia and advocate on behalf of our members, and the safety of their patients.

The NZSA is aware of the media release dated 2 December 2020, with the initiative to require the public sector to be carbon neutral by 2025, and we wish to make some comments.

The initiative is timely, and we fully support the Government's drive to reduce carbon emissions, in line with a maximum 1.5 degree increase in global warming. We support the Government in being ambitious, determined, and unrelenting in this aim.

With respect to carbon emissions, anaesthetists are doctors at the most polluting end of the scale. This is primarily due to the anaesthetic volatile agents (drugs to keep our patients asleep) which are amongst the most potent of greenhouse gases. Other anaesthetic pharmacological waste is also highly polluting and persistent in the environment. Our workplaces create vast amounts of waste, relying upon single use equipment and devices. This waste is discharged to our land, air, and water. The health sector is a major source of carbon release, and anaesthetic gases alone are a significant portion of that source, contributing around 4% of that from a typical public hospital.

The NZSA is eager to engage in processes where our carbon (and entire environmental) footprint can be safely and successfully reduced whilst maintaining the highest standards of patient care. Indeed, the NZSA believes that the health sector is ready to do this, and that a great deal of the required expertise and enthusiasm are ready and waiting.

With respect to the process of carbon reduction:

- The minority of emissions from healthcare are scope 1 and 2, with scope 3 representing ~ 60-70%. Scope 3 emissions must be included in this initiative. Scope 3 emissions include those from travel, education, procurement, and waste, and are exacerbated by our dependence on single-use, imported, short-lived, highly-packaged devices and disposables. It follows that concentrating on coal boilers and electric vehicles alone will fail to achieve the significant carbon reduction the Government has committed to achieve, and the public expects.
- Central coordination and sharing of experience can accelerate the process and reduce costs. To this end, the NZSA recommends establishing a central body, modelled on the UK's Sustainable Development Unit (SDU), which has been the primary driver for measuring the carbon footprint and implementing carbon reducing strategies in the NHS. A New Zealand SDU would work with DHBs, the relevant Ministries, and in particular with Pharmac. The role of a central multidisciplinary body to reduce duplication and disseminate successful strategies is pivotal.
- Equity needs to be at the heart of this initiative. Failure to deal with climate disruption will fall most heavily on the most vulnerable New Zealanders: the elderly, the young, the poor, indigenous people, and the sick. Carbon reduction inherently has opportunities for quadruple value outcomes, improving health and wellbeing, the environment, employment, and equity.
- Any failure to meet our carbon targets will require the health sector to divert much needed resources from healthcare to expensive offsets. Whilst that would be deplorable, a better course, politically, financially and environmentally, would be to invest now, rather than offset later. This initiative needs funding appropriate to its scope and ambition.

The healthcare sector is ready to work on the challenges and goals outlined in the Government's 2 December media release. The NZSA is committed to playing its part in meeting those goals. It is important to us that the three scopes are included, that equity is axiomatic to our nation's success, and that we be ambitious and determined. We believe adequate funding now is vastly superior to offsetting in the future, and that an SDU-like body is needed as soon as possible.



If you have any queries about the points raised in our letter, please contact me at president@anaesthesia.nz

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sheila Hart", is centered below the text "Yours sincerely".

Dr Sheila Hart
NZSA President