

A UK regional survey of public perceptions about environmental sustainability within Podiatric Healthcare

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Background

There is a climate emergency and need to achieve 45% reduction in Carbon emission by 2030 to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C. The UK NHS has a national environmental sustainability target to become a carbon neutral healthcare system by 2040. However, within Podiatry, there is limited research evaluating the carbon footprint of podiatric practices or informing strategic improvement targets. There is limited research describing public perspectives about podiatric sustainability. Thus, **the main project aim was to determine public perception of environmental sustainability in relation to podiatry.**

Methods

A public survey, conducted in a single UK region, was co-designed by academics, undergraduate students, and end-users, to iteratively refine content.

Four areas of focus were included:

1. Personal Protective Equipment,
2. Orthoses,
3. Consultation method,
4. Age-related perspective.

Quantitative data were analysed descriptively. Qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Data triangulation was completed to answer the question: **what are public perceptions about environmental sustainability in podiatry?**

Results

Overall, 41 survey responses were included. Participants described awareness of environmental sustainability, but limited consideration in relation to Podiatry.

Respondents were prepared to accept change to healthcare delivery in response to sustainability however, expected matters relating to clinical safety to be prioritised above sustainability.

Where appropriate respondents expected clinicians to flag sustainable choices and support shared decision making; the responsibility to assess 'risk touch points' versus identify 'choice touch points' was considered the healthcare professionals.

Respondents found the concept of sustainability easier to consider in relation to some aspects of healthcare (e.g., reduction of PPE/glove and apron use was viewed positively subject to the clinician risk assessment. However, this was less clear when considering use of sustainably sourced materials or processes (e.g., in relation to dressing or orthotic use).



Figure 2: Figurative representative of findings following mixed method triangulation of closed and open survey data.

Discussion

This study has yielded new insight into public perceptions about sustainability in podiatry; people expect facilitated choice, are prepared to accept some change to healthcare, and expect no safety compromise.

There was strong public perception that clinicians should highlight sustainable options and support shared decision making where relevant.

Small sample size and single region sampling limits result generalizability. Replication at scale and inclusion of tissue viability/dressings, not within this survey scope, warrant further investigation.

Clinical Significance

- There is **public expectation** that healthcare professionals enable sustainability within their practice.
- **Mechanisms to support** identification, implementation, and adoption of sustainable practices and **patient choice within podiatry** are needed.
- There is **minimal** underpinning evidence base or **best practice guidance**.
- Identifying '**choice touch points**' versus '**safety touch points**' are important steps.

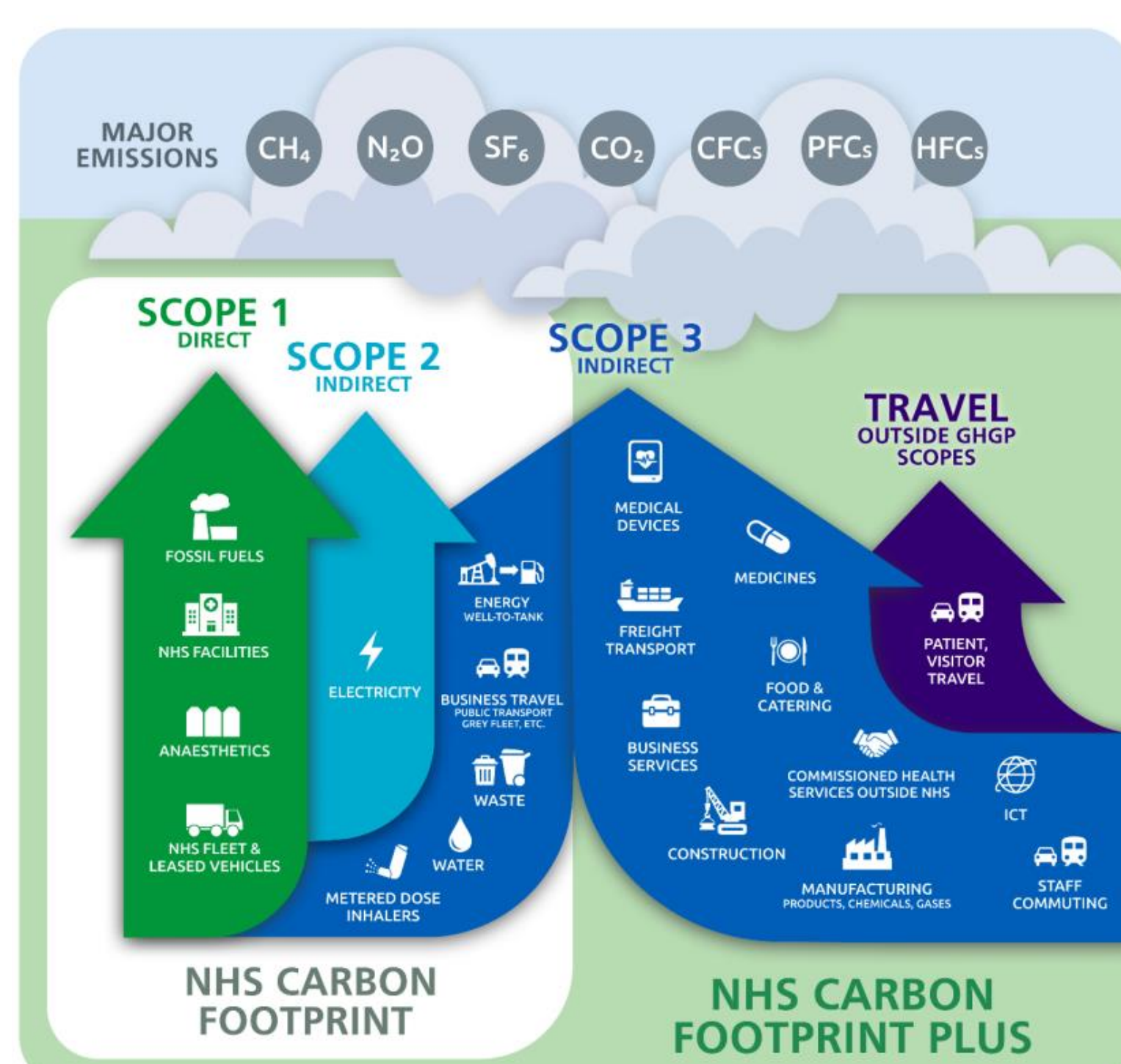


Figure 2: Greenhouse Gas Protocol: Scopes in the context of the NHS (NHS towards Net Zero, 2022).

References

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