

The Crofter: Sustainable Communications

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Editorial

Greetings from the croft. At the 2024 hybrid Autumn EMWA conference, the Sustainability Special Interest Group (SUS-SIG) team was delighted to host our second expert seminar series. In this issue, Sarah shares a few highlights

from the session, which offered glimpses of hope and inspiration against the background of the climate crisis. Medical writers emerge as pivotal figures in communicating on the environmental impact of healthcare. We hope

all our speakers and audience members enjoyed the session as much as we did, and look forward to running other seminars in the future!

Best,
Sarah and Louisa

Sustainability in healthcare: Updates and insights for medical writers

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Abstract

The 58th EMWA Conference last Autumn was the occasion of the second Sustainability Special Interest Group (SUS-SIG) expert seminar series. Our six panellists joined in a lively and thoughtful discussion with enthusiastic participants. The recording will soon be available to EMWA members on the SUS-SIG website found at emwa.org. In this article, I have summarised the key take-aways from the session, provide links to useful resources, and recap our panellists' invaluable tips on how to greenify your IT tasks.

At the hybrid EMWA conference in November 2024, EMWA's Sustainability Special Interest Group (SUS-SIG) hosted its second expert seminar series (ESS), featuring one returning speaker and introducing many new ones. We delivered this seminar to showcase the growing motivation among the healthcare community to reduce the negative environmental impacts of healthcare. We were delighted to host

speakers working at the forefront of durability and sustainability in healthcare, providing the viewpoints of biopharmaceutical and clinical research organisations, academia, and public health experts.



Changing perspectives and terminology

Amy Booth from the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences at the University of Oxford, England, opened her talk by highlighting how the healthcare industry's environmental impacts reach far beyond climate change alone. To illustrate this, she presented a case study of how antibiotic-treated cow carcasses caused deadly kidney disease and population decimation of scavenging South East Asian vultures;¹ this, in turn, lead to downstream impacts that caused the deaths of half a million people – an important reminder of how pharmaceutical products can have unforeseen ecological consequences.

An interesting take-away from Amy's talk was the changing fashions of environmental goals and terminologies. Previous targets such as "carbon neutral" and "net zero" are falling out of favour in preference for "real zero", which is a more stringent measure, includes all greenhouse gases, and cannot be reduced through off-setting.



Motivation to change in large companies

David Lumby from PPD, Thermo Fisher Scientific's Clinical Research Group provided fascinating insights into the ways that a large clinical research organisation approaches sustainability. On the topic of decentralised trials, previously covered in *Medical Writing*,² he highlighted a beneficial impact on sustainability, as participant retention rates are higher and sample sizes can be reduced. He also touched on the lower carbon footprint of clinical trials in Europe than in America, attributing this – partially – to clinical research associate trips that are more frequently taken by train in Europe than in the USA.



Climate impacts in Africa and a call-to-action to medical writers

Gomotsegang Fred Molelekwa from Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa, next talked about the roles that medical writers could play in raising awareness of environmental sustainability in



Africa. He noted that medical writers were perfectly placed to act as agents of change for sustainable healthcare in Africa, and urged us to: “Be at the forefront of advocacy initiatives pertaining to sustainable procurement in public and private healthcare sectors”.

He suggested further reading on websites such as South Africa’s Education for Sustainable Healthcare initiative (<https://saahe.org.za/education-for-sustainable-healthcare>) and the WHO’s Alliance for Transformative Action on Climate and Health (<https://www.who.int/initiatives/alliance-for-transformative-action-on-climate-and-health>).

Ambition Zero Carbon and green IT

Claudia Percivalle outlined AstraZeneca’s route towards achieving “ambition zero carbon” through a multi-pronged approach combining



life cycle assessments, safe active pharmaceutical ingredient discharge, and ecopharmacovigilance tracking, amongst others. She also shared her top five tips for incorporating green IT

into daily working practice (Figure 1). These prompted wincing among the participants as we recognised some of our own bad habits (don’t we all leave our PC on standby overnight every now and then?). Claudia’s suggestions are straightforward and easy to follow, so if you, too, spot some areas to improve, try and implement at least one this week, and pass on tips to your colleagues!



Green posters and hope for the future

During the panel discussion, **Gemma Rogers** described Oxford PharmaGenesis’ sustainable solution to conference posters.

She recounted having successfully switched from paper posters to fabric-printed ones which can be washed and reused. An added benefit: fabric posters are foldable and easy to transport! Gemma also highlighted a recent study, co-led by Oxford PharmaGenesis and the Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, on how pharmaceutical companies reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.³

1 Use links when sharing documents not attachments

2 Shut down your laptop every day

3 Reduce length of time storing Microsoft Teams’ recordings

4 Reduce printing

5 Reduce storage

Figure 1. Claudia Percivalle’s green IT tips to put into place immediately



Our expert panel also discussed lean writing strategies, where a focused effort is made to minimise the size and number of documents, and the My Green Lab freezer challenge, a good motivator to audit freezer contents and save energy. To get in on a chance to win a plaque and certificate, it is not too late to sign up for the 2025 competition, open to labs of all sizes: <https://www.mygreenlab.org/freezer-challenge.html>

Amid all the bad news on the climate crisis, panel members all gave reasons to be optimistic for the future. Amy noted that the people she works with are increasingly familiar with the terminology and issues at stake, indicating that messaging around green initiatives is reaching ever-broader audiences. Fred gave some examples of green energy initiatives in various hospitals and universities in Africa.

The three-hour seminar flew by and could easily have continued for another three. It is clear that there will be plenty of material to cover in a future ESS! A recording of the session should be available soon on the SUS-SIG section of the new EMWA website for those that were not able to attend.

SUS-SIG member and ESS co-host Catarina Leitao wrapped up the meeting with a quote from Jane Goodall, which I finish with here as an inspiring message for us as medical writers and

habitants of planet earth: "A great deal of our onslaught on Mother Nature is not really lack of intelligence but a lack of compassion for future generations and the health of the planet (...) True wisdom requires both thinking with our head and understanding with our heart."⁴

Be at the forefront of advocacy initiatives pertaining to sustainable procurement in public and private healthcare sectors.

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