



EMWA's newest special interest group: Sustainability SIG

By the EMWA Sustainability Special Interest Group

In 2015, the United Nations set 17 Sustainable Developments Goals (SDGs, Figure 1) as a “universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030”.¹ Central to these SDGs is planetary health, that body of research that looks at the complex interactions between “human-caused disruptions of Earth’s natural systems and the resulting impacts on human health”.²

As a professional organisation of medical communicators and healthcare professionals, we feel that EMWA should take a more active role in supporting these SDGs. Hence, we decided to ask for the EMWA Executive Committee (EC)’s blessing to set up a Special Interest Group (SIG) on Sustainability (SUS-SIG for short). We received approval on May 6, 2020.

Sustainability and health

There is a clear body of evidence indicating that global warming and the consequent climate change are drastically impacting human health. According to the World Health Organization, “between 2030 and 2050, climate change is

expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea and heat stress.”³ We are already experiencing unprecedented epidemics and natural disasters that directly and indirectly affect the health of whole human populations.

Governments and non-governmental organisations are taking steps in implementing policies to address these challenges but industries also need to do their part.

Many of us are employed within the pharmaceutical industry, a sector that is known for its very high carbon footprint⁴ and large volume industrial waste.⁵ Healthcare professionals, researchers, and scientists are calling for advocacy and action.² The World Medical Association, author of the Declaration of Helsinki, “is calling on all its members and on the global health community to adopt an environmentally responsible approach to their activities... This includes making health practice environmentally responsible and greening medical associations.”⁶

On Earth Day last year, the Clinicians for Planetary Health Working Group issued a global call to action to prioritise planetary health.² The EAT-Lancet Commission on Food, Planet, Health released its first report based on a full

scientific review of healthy diets and sustainable food systems to answer the question: Can we feed a future population of 10 billion people a healthy diet within planetary boundaries?⁷

Several professional associations and non-profit groups have also expressed their commitment to go green, such as PHUSE,⁸ Green Nephrology for sustainable kidney care,⁹ and the Korea Society for Green Hospitals.⁶ It is also encouraging to see that more and more pharmaceutical companies are going beyond patient centricity towards planet centricity.¹⁰ Through the SUS-SIG, we would like to mobilise the EMWA membership to support the SDGs professionally and privately.

Objectives of SUS-SIG

The objectives of this SIG are to:

- Promote and encourage action towards the 17 SDGs.
- Provide a forum for medical writers and communicators to discuss and share information in the area of sustainability.
- Support EMWA’s commitment to reduce the carbon footprint of the medical writing and communication profession and the healthcare industry.
- Exchange tricks and tips on how to be envi-

ronmentally mindful healthcare professionals and individuals.

Potential activities

To achieve these goals, we have several activities lined up:

- Work with the EC and the EMWA Head Office to reduce the carbon footprint of EMWA conferences.
- Engage EMWA sponsors and service providers in conversation to support EMWA commitments to sustainability.
- Promote presentations, webinars, workshops, and other events related to sustainability.
- Contribute and solicit articles on sustainability for *Medical Writing*

But we need more ideas! This is a call to the EMWA membership for your support, ideas, and input. If interested, please contact the SIG Founders detailed below.

The SIG founders

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3. World Health Organization. Climate Change. Available from: <https://www.who.int/health->

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6. World Medical Association. Green Health: Reducing the Environmental Impact of Healthcare. Available from: <https://www.wma.net/what-we-do/public-health/green-health/>.
7. EAT-Lancet Commission Summary Report 2019. Available from: <https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/eat-lancet-commission-summary-report/>
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Resources

Below are some websites and links that provide reliable information and data on sustainability:

- UN Sustainable Development Goals: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- The One UN Climate Change Learning Partnership: <https://www.unccllearn.org/>
- WHO: <https://www.who.int/sustainable-development/en/>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): <http://www.fao.org/nutrition/education/food-dietary-guidelines/background/sustainable-dietary-guidelines/en/>
- The Lancet Planetary Health: <https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/home>



Figure 1. The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals