

Anaesthesia and the Environment: What's next?

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The environment was once taken for granted. These days we need to treat it as we would treat a patient. With dignity and respect. First, we must do no harm.

Anaesthesia is to be congratulated. As a specialty, the NZ anaesthetic community has embraced the challenge to reduce the carbon footprint of patient care, without any loss of benefit or safety for patients. The use of desflurane, an extremely potent greenhouse gas, has so steeply declined over the past 5 years that we no longer feature in the top 10 carbon intense areas of healthcare in this country.

We have probably learned some new skills along the way. We have learned lessons, educated ourselves, and our colleagues. We have saved money, significantly reduced environmental harm, and created a template for other specialties to follow.

There have been trade-offs and substitutions, and these raise their own questions. We also must examine the landscape of the health system, and examine where we can make changes. We need to bravely mix our metaphors, and ask where are the hotspots, what is the low-hanging fruit, and where is this waka going?