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## Climate Change and the surgeon – what can be done now?

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Surgeons and other health professionals should be speaking out on the medical consequences of climate change.

In a special article published in the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' ANZ Journal of Surgery, Professor Alistair Woodward calls for healthcare to seize opportunities to reduce greenhouse gases produced by the industry. Often there is a chance to simultaneously improve population health.

"We understand that existing risks to health are multiplied by the physical changes to the global climate, so we should be looking at what actions we can take now to reduce that impact," Professor Woodward said.

The University of Auckland School of Population Health Professor says there are many ways for health systems to reduce their carbon footprint, including:

- Tele-medicine;
- Video-conferencing to replace air travel;
- Provision of public transport vouchers for patients and families;
- The use of electric cars and bikes and doctor/staff travel initiatives such as car – pooling, bicycle change rooms;
- Switching healthcare to renewable sources of energy where possible;
- Minimising the use of anaesthetic gases that are significant climate pollutants;
- Continuing commitment to 'green' operating theatres through recycling and reduction of theatre waste.

Transport is the fastest growing source of emissions. The increase in numbers of vehicles and distance travelled, as well as the 'massification' of our car choices in Australia and New Zealand, have cancelled out the gains from electric vehicles.

"We know that human activity has disrupted earth systems, and the global climate has been knocked off course. The world is heating, the oceans acidifying and the seas are rising, but we can introduce changes now if we are willing," Professor Woodard said.

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) is committed to developing more efficient or 'green' operating theatres using the principles of Reduce; Reuse; Recycle; Rethink; and Research are considered by surgeons and hospitals in order to effectively reduce waste management and lessen the impact of surgery on the environment.

ENDS.

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