



As the community navigates the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of environmental sustainability has been highlighted in terms of how each of us can undertake actions which are in the best interests of protecting the natural world.

Veterinarians are being encouraged to reduce their carbon footprint, by implementing a range of sustainability and recycling initiatives in vet clinics to reduce waste and better use resources. “The medical and veterinary professions are very wasteful, normally using a lot of single-use items, combined with the need to use a variety of high energy equipment such as imaging, IT and laboratory equipment, and 24-hour temperature regulation. Given the effects of climate change on animals, the veterinary profession has an obligation to do all we can to reduce our carbon footprint”, said Dr Anne Rainbow, Communications and Memberships Manager for Veterinarians for Climate Action (VfCA).

The group is about to launch their ClimateSmart hospital sustainability program to address all aspects of sustainability in vet practices, incorporating water and energy use, waste management and recycling. The program will be available to all corporate members of VfCA, with participating vet clinics also receiving a welcome pack of educational resources and acknowledgment of their support on VfCA’s website.

“Practices can become corporate members of VfCA and then begin the program in the coming months, with our first pilot group beginning shortly. The ClimateSmart program is also designed to promote cohesive teamwork and a positive clinic culture. Individual vets who are interested in sustainability can explain the benefits to their practice owners – including less waste, financial savings and a way to show corporate and climate responsibility”, said Dr Rainbow.

Veterinary practices are able to easily incorporate changes into their daily activities to achieve sustainability and recycling goals. This can include incorporating increased use of digital technologies and minimising the use of paper, together with recycling paper and cardboard products – and where possible recycling medical supplies too. In the veterinary profession, sustainability also takes into account the responsible use of veterinary medicines to minimise antimicrobial resistance.

Dr Tessa Murray, an associate veterinarian at Grantham St Veterinary Hospital in Perth, has been proactive in introducing a variety of sustainability initiatives into her workplace. “I first got started by literally Googling ‘plastic reduction in hospitals’ and this led me to the PVC recycling programs in human hospitals, which recycles IV fluid bags and tubing. The main sticking point was producing enough volume to make it worthwhile, so we came up with the idea of involving other local vet practices - we now have seven vet clinics using Grantham St as their recycling base. We have a single 240L bin system which is collected by the waste and recycling management company for a small charge, and our initiative has since expanded to also recycle syringes and glass ampoules, also collected for a small fee.”

“Although our recycling makes me delighted, I still see that there is so much scope to do more - especially given how many people have contacted me for information, and then struggled to set up programs in other states. My ‘vision’ is to have this become far more widespread, and I would love to see some of the veterinary suppliers coming on board as collection hubs”, said Dr Murray.

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