

IHF Partners' Workshop: In 2030, hospitals will be Sustainable. How Do We Get There?



The Partners' Workshop at the World Hospital Congress 2023 featured representatives from major international and non-governmental healthcare organizations. Participants exchanged on ways to advance the quality and delivery of care, while improving the climate footprint of the healthcare sector. The workshop was chaired by Bertrand Levrat, CEO of the Geneva University Hospitals, and facilitated by Sonia Roschnik, Executive Director of the Geneva Sustainability Centre.

Around 80 participants took part in the workshop. They were organized in roundtables, each facilitated by the representative of a partner organization and by a participant in this year's IHF Young Executive Leaders programme. Partner organizations included: European Association of Hospital Managers (EAHM), European Association of Private Hospitals (UEHP), European Health Management Association (EHMA), French Development Agency (AFD), Health Care Without Harm Europe, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), International Federation of Healthcare Engineering (IFHE), International Foundation for Integrated Care (IFIC), International Network of Health Promoting Hospitals and Health Services (HPH), International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua), and the World Patients Alliance (WPA).

The objective of the workshop was to identify the essential elements that will support the transition for hospitals to be fit for the future. This is a collective process, where all stakeholders co-create the path to follow and learn from each other.

During the workshop participants discussed ways in which the following scenario becomes reality:

“In 2030, hospitals are environmentally, socially, and financially sustainable. Their motivated workforce serves the communities by providing quality and equitable services and by promoting health. Hospitals benefit the environment and global population through their net-zero targets, which contributes to reducing the sector's climate footprint.”

The discussion developed around several essential building blocks to achieve this goal.

1. The need to have human resources fit for the future

Participants pointed out the importance of building and maintaining an energetic, compassionate, and competent workforce in the context of massive shortage in human resources in the health sector as well as issues surrounding staff burnout and wellbeing. To reach this objective, participants identified several actions that could lead to a flexible, work/life balanced, and healthy workforce.

- Health professionals' wellbeing programmes, including mental health support, individual counselling, coaching, burnout prevention activities, and physical activity promotion.
- Communications and guidance about the evolution of the healthcare sector, including the impact of technology, and specifically AI, as well as environmental sustainability in healthcare.
- More broadly, changes to the medical education system to include sustainability and technology aspects were proposed in supporting the case towards a more holistic and sustainable healthcare model.

2. Financing initiatives to make hospitals more resilient and sustainable

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Financial considerations are an essential component of the transformation towards low-carbon, resilient and sustainable healthcare. Differences between private and public financial mechanisms need to be clearly delineated and innovative financial models and payment methods could fund sustainability initiatives accordingly.

- Public hospitals with green initiatives could receive extra budget or have a degree of tax exception for their reduced impact on the environment.
- Investments in prevention and primary low-carbon care would reduce operational costs by reducing length of stay, increased bed rotation and reduction in energy consumption.
- Hospitals could leverage their combined purchasing power by coming together as one buyer and demand industry and suppliers to decarbonize. This would reduce [Scope 3 of greenhouse gas emissions](#), which account for 60% to 70% of a hospital's carbon footprint.

3. Net-zero healthcare and decarbonisation

One key aspect explored was the way in which hospitals can unlock the power of cross-functional collaboration, which is essential to net zero healthcare. The group also discussed the importance of data to inform decision making.

- Setting up multidisciplinary teams combining subject matter and clinical expertise, and who can break down silos, is paramount to cross-functional collaboration. This needs to happen organization-wide, anchored in common values, with a clear agenda and powered by training and education opportunities.
- Collaborating cross-functionally with suppliers to create green supply chains is also vital in decarbonisation efforts, especially through Scope 3 emissions reduction. For example, pharmaceutical companies could be encouraged to put information about sustainability on their labels.
- Relevant KPIs need to be included within change strategies, leading to enhanced accountability and increased impact. This applies to cross-functional collaboration, and to measurements on carbon emissions and sustainability impacts to establish a baseline for progress tracking.

These suggestions, combined with reuse and recycle initiatives, a reduction in the use of disposable items (particularly plastics), a rethinking of the sanitising process, more efficient electricity consumption, and sustainable waste treatment, would enable net zero and decarbonised healthcare.

4. Alternative models of healthcare delivery

Innovative models of care are essential in achieving environmentally, socially, and financially sustainable hospitals. Participants identified the need for integrated sustainable healthcare service delivery models and discussed the role and setup of hospitals accordingly.

- Sustainable service delivery models rely on community engagements and partnerships. Community and primary healthcare facilities should be strengthened which would allow hospitals to focus on secondary/tertiary care. Also, community centres could lead to a more health aware and educated population and less hospital visits.
- Moving away from the traditional hospital setup would require the use of technology to provide care for patients remotely (telemedicine) which helps reduce commutes. Coupled with a policy of early discharge of patients and remote patient monitoring, it would allow reducing carbon emissions from commutes and overall hospital operations as well as increasing bed availability.
- This integrated healthcare model would also contribute to more equitable healthcare delivery since it can, for instance, deliver access to specialist guidance when it may not be available locally. However, this needs to consider barriers to older population groups (for instance in terms of telemedicine adoption) as well as possible language barriers. Developing new equitable health policies would need to include the voices of diverse groups/types of patients as part of the process rather than making assumptions about what they might want or think.

5. Redefined leadership competency

A final building block discussed was the need for leadership competencies for transformation to ensure the vision of sustainable hospitals. The participants discussed required shifts of the traditional leadership styles, as well as specific action items to strengthen and build leadership capacities.

- Shifting from traditional transactional leadership into transformational leadership would provide global stewardship for sustainability. This vision is shared by the latest [IHF Leadership Competency Model](#), published in 2023. This means ensuring alignment, ownership, and accountability by all staff and not only the high-level leadership, as well as incorporating educational activities and organizational culture changes. These changes would increase awareness and recognition of the value of sustainability in healthcare.
- A specific action point discussed with regards to environmental sustainability was reshaping the governance structures so that sustainability does not become siloed to one department. Similarly, organizations should be encouraged to appoint a Chief Sustainability Officer (or equivalent) to oversee the sustainability strategy throughout the hospital.
- Health sector workers have strong care values. Aligning them with sustainability values through clear transformative leadership and an inclusive organizational culture will be instrumental in delivering sustainable net zero hospitals.

Transforming hospitals to be fit-for-future is a collective process, where all stakeholders co-create the path and learn from each other. Cross-collaboration between multidisciplinary teams combined with accountable and transformational leadership can lead to innovative alternative care models that have sustainability and equity at their heart. A committed and motivated health care workforce is key for fit-for-future hospitals – staff wellbeing, inclusion, and professional development are fundamental.

These insights can inform our network's strategies and our conversations towards next year's Partners Workshop during [IHFs 47th World Hospital Congress](#) in Rio de Janeiro, where we will continue to engage in ways to build fit-for-future hospitals.

Source: [IHF](#)

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