**Sustainability Learnings from the NHS

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Thank you very much indeed. So, I’m only going to talk for 10 minutes, you’ll be glad to know. So, not for very long, and I have got some slides, which we may or may not use but I thought it would be just useful to follow that introduction by just giving you an outline of what we’ve managed to achieve and what mistakes we’ve made and what regrets we’ve had in the UK.

So, climate change is the new normal. It’s happening, it’s now, it’s here. Ok, I was having breakfast this morning, having a conversation with a 16 year old schoolgirl about the curriculum, about climate change in this fair city. It’s not bizarre, it’s not weird, it’s not off-message, it’s not left field, it’s hear and now. So, I just thought I’ll very briefly tell you 5 of 6 things I wish I’d known 10 years ago. That would have been really useful. We could have been even more successful, I think, if we’d known these things 10 years ago and it’s entirely up to you whether you choose to learn from the past but those ... you may know that saying that those people who do not learn from history, are destined to repeat it.

So, the first thing that happened 10 years ago, was we had a Climate Change Act, as you just heard. We had a Climate Change Act in the UK and it was incredibly helpful but it wasn’t the climate change Act, per se, it wasn’t that bold leadership from politicians that made the difference. The difference it made was, it enabled, it permissioned, it legitimised action from all levels of society, so people could stop whispering about what needed to be done and started talking about what needed to be done, as a new normal. So, that’s the first thing is, for goodness sake, use the legislation you’ve got and, as you’ve just heard, it won’t be legislation just in climate change. In the UK, we have other legislation, like the Social Value Act, which is precisely what we’ve heard about – you’re obliged for contracts over this amount to consider the financial, economic, the social and the environmental value of these contracts. It is the law. Ok, so the law is quite motivating but it’s quite enabling too. So, you should use it.

And, we have another law in Wales called the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. How good is that? What a name for an Act. Very, very cleverly put. Very, very cleverly written legislation and written by clever members of parliament – members of the Welsh Assembly. Written in such a way that you could not argue against it and it actually has had far more repercussions because it mandates that all policy, all legislation, all regulation has to pass a test of what is the effect of this likely to be on future generations. How can you argue against that? So, that’s good. So, don’t ever belittle the role of the law. The law is incredibly important and your law is framed in a very similar way to our law and we didn’t need to – in the UK – we didn’t need to actually quote it verbatim but it’s always very good to have it verbatim memorised, the actual phrases about carbon targets, carbon trajectories, targets by 2050 and 2050 sounds a long way off, so one of the things we did, we made intermediate targets for 2015, 2020, 2030 and said “are we on target?”. 2050 is a long way. In the health world, 2050 is a long way away. In the health world, reaching the end of the clinic is a long way away. We are very much people of the present. So, that’s the first issue.

The second is please, please, please stop talking about climate change as an environmental issue. Climate change is a health issue. Ok. The reason the United States have been so successful with their air quality laws is because air quality has always been framed in the United States as a health issue. Ok. So, if you start talking about things as an environmental issue, you’ll get daft people saying “well, that’s very interesting but I’m a health professional, I’m not an environmental professional”. So,

siloed is the human condition, that’s not unnatural, not uncommon. So, start talking about it as a health issue. Why? Because it is a health issue, that’s why.

The third thing, which we stumbled across very late and this makes a huge difference when you’re running, when you’re interested in governance, when your role is governance, is embed sustainability in the government and quality framework. Ok, and you’ll always catch someone who is able to do this. So, essentially, in the health and care system in England, there are dimensions of quality which every person in this room would recognise. Like compassion, like effectiveness, like safety and those are supplemented by three other dimensions of quality, which are cost-effectiveness, equity and sustainability and we’ve managed to embed that in the quality framework. So, that normalises it more operationally, as the law does strategically.

The fourth thing, and this may sound just like detail, but it’s really important is do not separate adaptation and mitigation. We have the bizarre situation in the UK, where one government department looked after mitigation and another government department looked after adaptation. Not the greatest idea, ok. So, it has to be, they have to be locked together and that’s especially true in the health world, because many of the things that adapt to an uncertain and unsafe future, would also mitigate it and, if you explore that thesis even further, you’ll see there are so many co-benefits for long term health that deliver immediate health benefits. I’m talking about air quality, I’m talking about food, I’m talking about physical activity, I’m talking about social cohesion, I’m talking about loneliness, all these sorts of major social determinants of immediate health have long term benefits for our health and our resilience and issues like a sustainable health care system.

So, that leads us to the fifth point, really, which is you’ll quite often see, and we’ve seen this a lot, people being so siloed in their thinking, so they’ll say “I’m not interested in climate change, I’m interested in transport quality” and you think yeah, there is a link, there is a very powerful link. So, you have to have people who’ve got a systems approach. You can’t allow people to say, for instance, “I’m not interested in type 2 diabetes, I’m interested in obesity”. I mean, that is just crazy, that is just ridiculous. Ok. So, what we do, we’ve developed a framework, we’ve developed a plan in the UK that acknowledges there are multiple entry points where everybody can contribute sort of corporately, collectively, to this issue of our time. This issue of our time – climate change. Happening now, on our watch. Happening now. This is not a future issue. It’s not an over there issue. It’s a here and now issue. It’s not a they issue. It’s a we issue, it’s an I, it’s a now issue and we have to be very clever and crafty and far-sighted to embed the actions needed into our daily work and that happens right at the top, as in the Well-being and Future Generations Act but it happens now.

8% of the total Energy budget in England is spent on one disease, which is largely preventable and sometimes reversible – 8% and that disease is what? Type 2 diabetes. Ok, type 2 diabetes is crippling health systems around the world but, more importantly, it’s crippling people, which is more important but, actually, all the actions which you would take about managing, preventing, creating conditions which would reduce the incidence and prevalence of type 2 diabetes, nearly all of them would have an affect on climate change beneficially. Ok, so you may have heard that famous phrase that says “what happens if climate change is a hoax and we create a better world for nothing?”. Ok, very important, very important. So, that’s the fifth lesson.

Everybody’s got a role to do. And, finally, what I would say is that there are multiple reasons, multiple entry points why you might encourage your colleagues to take this issue seriously. Not just your own legacy or what your historians would say to you about your children are saying about you but these four things are this: most people in senior positions like yourselves, don’t like to break

things, especially don’t do these – don’t break the law, ok, don’t break the break and don’t break the contract of the people you purport to serve. Very important.

So, actually, that amounts to four things – money, science, evidence, the law and ethics, ok. So, any one of those entry points are very powerful. So, I would echo that the words we just heard that 190 countries, of which Australia is one, and in which Victoria is the leading state, have got every opportunity to amass huge health gains, huge reputation issue, huge public applaud, by leadership at every level. So, there’s nothing to lose but the future.

So, I would absolutely implore you to keep on the journey of what we’re doing about this and one of the most extraordinary things that we did and, I can’t take any credit for this because it wasn’t my idea, was we consulted widely and in the consultation widely with your staff, with your public, with your policy makers, you illiberate [sic] all sorts of fantastic ideas and fantastic mandate about action. So, it’s not if we should act, it’s how we should act and at what pace and scale we need to act and, the most extraordinary thing was, when we went looking for ideas, we didn’t just find ideas, we found action. Things were going on already and if you just co-defy what is going on, it almost automatically builds a framework for action on which some of the parts of that framework is already being filled by such fantastic things going on here and now in the state of Victoria, this city of Melbourne. They are going on now, so you don’t need to create that inspiration. If you go out and look for it, you’ll find it.

Thank you.

[Applause]