**Sustainability Learnings from the NHS

Robert Fiske**

It feels a little bit humbling to stand up here when you know that most of the work - and David mentioned about representing the people of the organisation, in terms of their efforts and leading them – so, I’d just like to just put a thanks out to Tiernan and my little environmental and sustainability team that works within the Building Authority because I think they’re doing a great effort in terms of these sorts of events as well. So, I can’t see Tiernan. Tiernan.

David mentioned that the health of the environment and our health are actually inter-related and, at the Building Authority, we’re increasingly recognising that. We’re starting to take the view that we’re actually in the business of creating places, not just buildings. And that kind of logic and the link to the environment and sustainability is probably a slight change in how we have traditionally looked at the construction, for example, of a hospital.

It’s actually more than that. If we create healthy places, we actually create healthy people. Or at least, we don’t add to unhealthy people.

So, in terms of just talking through some of the challenges and some of the things we’re doing, I thought I might start by going through a few facts and figures to kind of present those sobering facts about the challenges that we face here in Victoria.

I’m always conscious that we all have very, very busy lives and sometimes the data of actually what’s happening probably isn’t getting to everybody’s heads at every given time.

So, let’s just talk about the health system at the moment here in Victoria. We emitted the equivalent of 48,000 household’s worth of carbon in 2016/17. We generated the waste of equivalent to 47,000 households.

To put it into perspective and to bring it down to what those large numbers actually mean, it’s the equivalent of all of the waste for Ballarat and Sunbury combined. So, a whole city, basically.

We used enough water to fill 1,680 Olympic swimming pools in one year. And, every day, every occupied bed day on average emits 120 kilos of carbon and uses 600 litres of water, and every patient generates approximately four kilos of waste.

Now, when you take those numbers and you look at how many episodes of care we’re responsible for every year, which is in the order of 10 million, they’re enormous numbers and that’s today where our population is approaching 5.5 million people.

Now, as David mentioned, people sort of think about what does 2050 actually look like. It’s a long way away. In 2050, we already know that Victoria is looking at a population of over 10 million people. So, you multiply those numbers and if we actually don’t do anything about it and we don’t change, the problem and the impacts to us, as people, actually multiplies to a level that my small brain actually can’t comprehend sometimes. So, it’s a significant impact and we need to do something about it.

In terms of the Building Authority, we currently look after 22 billion dollars’ worth of assets just in the health system, and this year we were funded another billion dollars to add to our already 3.6 billion dollars’ worth of infrastructure projects.

So, the number of hospitals, the number of health activities that we are going about creating is going to increase and increase. And, so, if we don’t look at how we approach the delivery of that infrastructure - if we don’t look at what that means operationally and in terms of sustainability – then, again, as a key player in solving for the future, we’re the ones that are actually going to be contributing to the problem into the future. So, it’s actually organisations like ours that have a very strong leadership role to play in this.

We have a - in every one of your sort of responsibilities around creating infrastructure, there’s also some ancillary activities that we’re responsible for. The Building Authority, we know that one of them is advocating for sustainability. We need to be a leader in it because we’re creating infrastructure and if we actually design in problems, then there’s no way that the people that are operating our facilities and operating our health services can actually solve with what we provide if it’s not working.

Now, we are improving. It’s not all doom and gloom. We’ve actually, believe it or not, come a long way even though those numbers were quite sobering at the very start.

Since 2005/6, our carbon emissions per metre squared have reduced by 12%. Our water use has reduced by 42%. So, you can imagine what they were in 2005/6. And we’ve used 659 million litres of water less than we did in 2005/6.

We’ve actually done that in an environment where we’re adding more and more infrastructure every day. So, that’s actually a really, really good news piece. We’re not there yet. We’ve got to go a lot further but that gives you a sense of the challenge and the fact that we actually need to solve for it, as we continue to grow our infrastructure.

Victoria has legislated a target to be net carbon zero by 2050 and has to develop a climate change strategy every five years from 2021. I think that builds on the point that David was mentioning, is 2050 is too far. We actually need to check in with ourselves as we’re going and take the opportunity on those check-in processes to actually correct ourselves if we’re actually going astray.

And for those who aren’t in the infrastructure game, that five-year period is actually quite important because from the time you get funded for a piece of infrastructure, it normally takes about that time to actually build a piece of infrastructure. So, it’s actually a good check-in timeframe for us.

We can’t do it alone. Really pleased that there’s a lot of CEO’s in the room. Really pleased that there’s a lot of leaders from the health service in the room. We actually need the health services and the people working within our system to work with us on working through what are the solutions to old problems, in terms of how we approach sustainability.

We have a role to lead but we actually need leaders to help and we actually need the grass roots support as well, in terms of if we do create different designs, if we do create different approaches to old problems, that the folks within all of our organisations actually work within that and support what we’re actually trying to achieve.

We’re about to release an Environmental Sustainability Strategy. It will be the first within the Victorian Public Health system. It actually builds on a lot of the work that David has led in the NHS and I think it’s a further demonstration of our commitments going forward.

We’ve recently joined the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals Network and I know that there are a number of health services in this room who are also members. If you’re not, I encourage you to commit and become members of those networks, show your passion and show your leadership for sustainability.

And, looking forward in terms of the work we’re doing, we’re actually ... you’re going to see more in terms of this space from us. Next week, we’re hosting an industry forum at the Melbourne Convention Centre. I encourage you to go. We have about 900 representatives from the construction, the design, the architectural and the consultant space across Victoria attending. And, we’ll be leaving them with a couple of key messages. One is design matters and sustainability matters. So, moving forward, we’ll make it clear to our industry partners that there isn’t the option of not working with us on creating a sustainable health service.

We’ll also be establishing a program of grants for public health services to foster sustainability, innovation and research. We’ll be installing - there’s a number of projects already about to kick off where we’re installing about five megawatts of solar power on our hospitals. In fact, Felicity Topp who’s the CEO of Peninsula Health is here in the room and she’s leading one of those. And, we’ll also be expanding our report on carbon emissions, implementing a number of waste improvement opportunities and completing a climate risk assessment of our hospitals and ambulance stations infrastructure. I’m a great believer that if you confront people with the facts, it actually is one way of stimulating the methods to change. And knowing what your current performance is like actually helps in creating the dynamic for future improvement and performance.

Look, for us, sustainability will become increasingly more important. You know, I’m probably a grey-haired chap from the sixties and growing up, it wasn’t important, but I know with kids, it will become increasingly important. And so, I think we all have a role in terms of leading the future and creating the future for our successors and our kids. It will take a number of things, though, from us. It will take leadership and it will take a collaborative effort and a commitment to actually want to change and that’s probably the one key thing that I’d leave you with is we have a very important role. If nobody is prepared to stand up and say, "We need to change," nothing will ever change. I think that’s one of the key things that I’ve learnt in my short journey around sustainability and leading the Building Authority, that we have a very important role in creating the future. Thank you.

[Applause]