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## The *BMJ*'s commitment to achieving net zero by 2040

Journals and publishers are part of the problem and must lead on the solutions

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The 2023 synthesis report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change leaves no doubt about the impact of human behaviour on planetary health and the urgent need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>1</sup> *The BMJ* has long raised awareness about the climate emergency, highlighting the effects on people's physical and mental health and the consequences for biodiversity, wildlife, habitats, and the health of the planet.<sup>2</sup>

Publishing and campaigning on climate action are important but not enough. As a company with both print and digital products, *BMJ* is part of the problem. Journals and publishers regularly call on readers and other health professionals to show sustainability in their clinical practice—we must also be at the forefront of the solution.

Reaching net zero will be complex given the number of supply chains involved in publishing, but other industries have done this and we cannot use complexity as an excuse. The collective power of the publishing industry can put pressure on supply chains and companies to decarbonise. We can also learn from measures taken by the UK's NHS.

In January 2023, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust published a strategic plan for reaching net zero.<sup>3</sup> The plan includes a programme for reducing the carbon footprint of the hospital estate—for example, by looking at buildings' energy, waste, and water supplies; moving to more sustainable medical practices such as reducing the use of certain anaesthetic gases and switching to more sustainable inhaler options; and considering indirect effects on the hospital's carbon footprint from external suppliers, staff commuting, and medicines and medical devices. The plan recognises the importance of engaging staff, patients, and external suppliers in the strategy to achieve net zero. It is also clear on the barriers to success, such as funding, the scale of the project, and cultural barriers to change.

The publishing industry faces similar challenges. Print products have a higher carbon footprint than digital products.<sup>4</sup> However, online publication is not impact free, and reaching net zero in publishing is not just about moving away from print but considering the environmental impact of all activities, estates, equipment, travel, and supply chains.<sup>5</sup> Many of the larger publishing houses, including Springer Nature, Oxford University Press, and Conde Nast, are working towards net zero by switching to renewable energy, using Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) paper, and reducing paper weight.<sup>5-7</sup>

### First steps

*The BMJ* is also working to reduce its environmental impact. The paper in the print edition is all traceable to a sustainably managed forest. All three UK print editions are wrapped in FSC paper and have on-pack recycling labelling. International copies are wrapped in a recyclable and carbon neutral polywrap.

*BMJ* is working with a climate and sustainability consultant to calculate a baseline for its carbon footprint and to build a reduction plan towards carbon neutrality by 2040. We are appointing a sustainability taskforce to ensure that all parts of the business are included. We are committed to communicating our sustainability efforts internally and externally, and to working with editorial teams across all *BMJ* journals. We plan a full environmental assessment of *BMJ* and its external supply chains.

*The BMJ* recently signed the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change's commitment to help organisations "take steps to mitigate and adapt to climate change."<sup>8</sup> One key commitment is to publish a plan to achieve net zero. By signing this commitment, we pledge to identify and measure our carbon footprint, establish ways to reduce our carbon emissions, set a target for when we will reach net zero, establish intermediate targets, create an implementation plan, and report progress annually.

Journals cannot do this alone; they require backing and commitment from publishers and owners. *BMJ*, as an organisation, is also a signatory of the UN SDG publishers compact—a commitment to uphold progress towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs), work towards sustainable practices, and champion the SDGs to protect people and the planet.<sup>9</sup> We call on all publishers to join us in prioritising achieving net zero across medical and scientific publishing.

Competing interests: We have read and understood *BMJ* policy on declaration of interests and declare that JD is a trustee of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change.

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