

Tim Doak:

Welcome all. This is Tim Doak, host of Sustainable Healthcare, a podcast of the Healthy, Happy, & Wise Podcast Series produced by Northern Light Health. We're getting ready for our second season and planning episodes. Is there a topic about sustainability you'd like to learn more about? Then share it with us at northernlightmedia@northernlight.org and we may take your suggestions. To new listeners, we welcome you to join us. And to current listeners, welcome back. To get ready for season two, we want to share a highlight reel of our conversations from season one. Roll the teaser.

Jonathan Slutzman:

Healthcare is a huge contributor to climate change.

Hannah Pingree:

The climate is changing, and so Maine is just trying to play our part.

Ellen Belknap:

So in your house, in your school, in your hospital, how can we shape what we call the envelope of the buildings?

Gabriela Alcalde:

Health equity really requires that we pay attention to where people live, where they work, where they play.

Tim Doak:

We call that a teaser because it's designed to whet your appetite and keep you listening for more. So let's dive in. One of my longest trips in season one was to Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston to talk to Dr. Jonathan Slutzman, director of the Center for Environment and Health, and the medical director for Environmental Sustainability. As a physician and environmental engineer, Dr. Slutzman had a unique perspective on how hospitals and healthcare systems can impact our climate.

Jonathan Slutzman:

Healthcare is a huge contributor to climate change, and it's particularly important because it's contrary to our mission. Our primary mission is protecting human health. That's why we're here. That's why I go to work every night to take care of patients. That's why our hospitals are here. About eight and a half percent of all of the greenhouse gases emitted in the United States are from healthcare services. That puts us as the 13th largest country if the healthcare industry were its own country. Globally, healthcare is closer to about 5% of the total and would be the fifth-largest country as an emitter of greenhouse gases. So we are solidly part of the problem, and as I said, it's really contrary to our mission.

Tim Doak:

I really enjoyed my conversation with Hannah Pingree, director for the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. Hannah is of course also the co-chair of the Maine Climate Council, and I had the pleasure of serving on one of the council's workgroups this year. We met Hannah in Augusta to talk about the steps Maine was taking to address climate change.

Hannah Pingree:

So what the scientists are telling us are what we're all feeling. The climate is changing. It's impacting our natural environment. It's impacting the weather events that we see. And unfortunately, the challenging

news is they tell us that it will get worse. So it's sobering, but I think what's motivating is that scientists tell us that the climate is changing, but that we can play a role in slowing that change through reducing our emissions globally. And so Maine is just trying to play our part. That is why part of the reason we have the Climate Council, we have set these goals, and that we are working every day to take action. Because we're not just passively listening to this news, we know that we can play a role in changing the trajectory of the science and the global climate challenges that we're all facing. It's daunting, but it should be motivating.

Tim Doak:

In addition to hosting this podcast, I'm also the vice president for facilities, sustainability, and supply chain for Northern Light Health. So one area that I'm very fascinated about is in creating sustainable buildings. It's why I truly enjoyed my chat with Ellen Belknap, president of SMRT Associates and a licensed architect in Maine, New Hampshire, and New Jersey, who specializes in sustainable construction.

Ellen Belknap:

I think there's a couple of big things. One is we are heating and cooling interior space. And especially in Maine, it's a climate where we're inside a lot of the year and we are incurring heating loads. So in your house, in your school, in your hospital, how can we shape what we call the envelope of the building? So the envelope is the walls, the roof, the windows, the doors, anything between the inside and the outside, those surfaces. If we can make those surfaces highly insulated and not transfer cold from the outdoor in, then our heating load, the amount of energy we have to burn to create heat and keep ourselves comfortable is reduced.

Because what we know is our climate is impacted by our carbon footprint. That's the amount of CO2 that we release in terms of burning something to keep us warm or drive our cars or whatever fuel we're using to accomplish the need. So if we can reduce the need, then we're doing good for the planet because we know that what's causing climate warming, extreme weather, all of the negative impacts of climate change is too much carbon going into the air. And so if we can reduce that, it's all to the good.

Tim Doak:

Lastly, as a healthcare system, our primary mission is to improve the health of the people and communities we serve. So we wanted to talk about the intersection of climate change and the role it can play in health equity. For that, we turn to Gabriela Alcalde, executive director of the Elmina B. Sewall Foundation. She holds a doctorate in public health and has spent her career advancing health equity and social justice.

Gabriela Alcalde:

Health equity I think in the simplest way for me to put it is both a process and the state of everyone having access to an experience of being able to achieve the best health possible for them. And because the majority of our health is determined by factors outside of the individual, meaning outside of your genetic makeup or your biology, even outside of your diet and exercise, and even outside of healthcare. Health equity really requires that we pay attention to where people live, where they work, where they play. So the context where people live is just as important for your health equity, if not actually more important than anything that an individual themselves alone could do.

If I could add one more piece because I think a lot of times people think of equity as equality. They sound similar, they seem like similar, but it's actually very different. I use the comparison between the two to explain equity. A lot of equality is, if you have a pie, you split it into equal pieces. With equity, you have a more complicated assessment. You have to think about who ate last, who might have higher need for

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calories, who might never have had pie in their life, who is not going to eat for the next few hours. So you start thinking about each person's circumstances and you apply them to that, so you're not going to end up dividing that pie up in equal slices.

Tim Doak:

That's a retrospective of season one. You can find full episodes by visiting northernlighthouse.org/healthyhappywise. And get ready for season two. We start new episodes in January, and we'll have those episodes on our website. But we're also on Apple, YouTube, and Spotify, which makes it easy for you to listen on the go on your favorite app. This is Tim Doak asking you to live sustainably.