

Environmental Sustainability in the ICU; an Oxymoron?

The acronym 'ICU' begins with Intensive, indicating that considerable resources are spent keeping patients alive. Such resources include money, labour, advanced equipment and buildings, and consumables. All of these ICU resources have an environmental footprint. In this study we quantify what healthcare's environmental footprint is, introduce 'life cycle assessment' (the 'cradle to grave' life of a process or product), and how we quantify environmental footprints (carbon footprint/water use/pollution etc.).

We then examine the growing research base of life cycle assessment within healthcare as a whole, and critical care medicine more particularly. Data surrounding drugs, pathology, radiology, ICU equipment, plastics and other consumables are all examined with 'hot spots' highlighted. As climate change is becoming an existential threat to human health we focus upon carbon footprints and what doctors can do to limit these footprints, whilst providing effective ICU care.

"Primum non nocere..."