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Update from Dr J Hickey

It was both a worry and an inspiration hearing the really emotive pleas coming from Sir David Attenborough at the COP26 summit around climate change and our carbon footprint. The irony was not lost when I had to order heating oil for home this week while I was also looking at buying an electric car.

Even the NHS has a long-term commitment to reduce carbon emissions and one surprising way is to optimise the use of inhalers used for respiratory conditions such as Asthma and COPD. Maintaining good control of these potentially life-threatening conditions is the first priority, however we may be able to do so with less impact on the environment. The most commonly used inhalers are called Metered-Dose-Inhalers (MDIs) and are those that have a cannister that you push and a plume of medication will come out which you should then inhale through a spacer.

Salbutamol, used mainly in Asthma, is the largest source of carbon emission from medicines we prescribe and emit some 250 times more CO₂ per dose than the dry powder equivalent. Ultimately one Salbutamol inhaler of "Ventolin" has a carbon footprint of 28kg per inhaler which is the same carbon footprint of driving 175miles. I'm not sure exactly what the car is, where and how it is driven, but I think the point is still surprising.

The key message is that good control of the condition is imperative, however if we can use dry powder or soft mist inhalers (that don't contain Hyrdofluorocarbons) then we can do our bit to reduce global warming. Other things can reduce the numbers of inhalers needed, such as: regular exercise; stopping smoking; good inhaler technique and regular review to ensure the best treatment is being used (and to avoid a telling off from Jackie).

Over the next year we will invite people to try alternative inhalers for this reason and I'm sure this environmental issue will open people to change. Listening to the COP26 news has made me want to get this off my chest all week, so now this is done I can go off and hug a tree while I think about parking an electric car next to our oil tank...

With best wishes on behalf of the Surgery - Jack Hickey, GP