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GREEN LEADERSHIP IN HEALTHCARE—HOW HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS CAN MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE AND REDUCE THEIR CARBON FOOTPRINT

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The healthcare sector itself contributes to climate change, the creation of hazardous waste, use of toxic metals such as mercury, and water and air pollution. To mitigate the effect of healthcare provision on the deteriorating environment and avoid creating further challenges for already burdened health systems, Global Green Hospitals was formed as a global network. Groote Schuur Hospital (GSH), as the leading academic hospital in Africa, joined the network in 2014. Since then, several projects have been initiated to reduce the amount of general waste, energy consumption and food waste, and create an environmentally friendlier and more sustainable hospital in a resource constrained public healthcare setting. Various efforts have been made to reduce the carbon footprint of GSH and reduce waste and hazardous substances such as mercury and polystyrene. The hospital was able to halve the amount of coal and water used, increase recycling by 50% over 6 months, replace polystyrene cups and packaging with Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) recyclable paper-based products, reduce the effect of food wastage by making use of local farmers, and implement measures to reduce the amount of expired pharmaceutical drugs. In addition, the intensive care units in the hospital are now also participating in the recycling initiative to reduce the amount of hazardous waste and waste costs. To improve commitment from all involved role-players, political leadership, supportive government policies and financial funding is mandatory, or public hospitals will be unable to tackle the exponentially increasing costs related to climate change and its effects on healthcare.