

11th Annual GC3 Innovators Roundtable Session Proceedings

Hosted by Seventh Generation in Burlington, VT

May 24th, 2016

KEYNOTE I

Gary Cohen, Health Care Without Harm and Practice Greenhealth

Dr. Cohen made the link between the growing incidences of disease due to toxic chemical exposure, increase in disease due to a climate change, and the role that the health care industry plays in adding to these problems as well as in driving solutions. He discussed the growth in cancer throughout the world and that everyone now is touched by cancer, whether they have contracted it themselves or know of someone who has. He stated that it is morally wrong that we have become normalized to the fact that children are born into the world having been exposed to chemicals in the womb that are known to cause birth defects and cancer. On top of that, they grow up being encouraged to eat food that is unhealthy and linked to obesity and diabetes.

In addition, climate change is reversing years of public health improvements, leading to more water born diseases, asthma, and infectious diseases. Indoor and outdoor air pollution kill twice as many people as AIDS, malaria, and TB combined. The US spends more on health than any other country in the world, but with the worst outcomes because we don't focus on preventative health.

Environmental factors are a key driver in human health outcomes, and health care itself has a huge environmental impact; it is one of the largest users of toxic chemicals in the US, and indoor air quality in hospitals is the most frequent cause of workplace asthma. The health care sector is the largest part of the economy after the military; it has a moral obligation and good business reasons to be the leader in improving environmental health. Health Care Without Harm and Practice Green Health work with hospitals worldwide to transform health care, leading to policy and market changes that impact the rest of the economy. They are looking for the next innovations to drive the next generation of what health care is about.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Opportunities for Safer Chemicals and Products:

- The health care sector is looking for safer products for food and food service; furnishings for office, waiting area, exam rooms, and surgical suites;

administrative products; medical products; lighting; paint; cleaning products; and more.

Key Drivers for Safer Chemicals and Products:

- Health care can model the transition to low carbon and low toxicity for the rest of the economy.
- We will do better when we stop defending products on the market that have risk, and instead put energy into new innovations that create fewer environmental and health harms.
- If we can create social and environmental improvements, we can scale improvements in health outcomes more quickly than if we focused on new treatment technologies or waited for policy change.

Helpful Actions to Advance Green Chemistry:

- Due to the scale of the health care industry, change can happen quickly when hospitals pool their buying power. Examples include phasing out mercury, moving the market towards sterilization (rather than incineration or disposal) of equipment, sustainable food, and flame-retardant-free furnishings.

Role for the GC3 to Advance Green Chemistry:

- Identify new green chemistry opportunities and innovations for the health care sector.