

Climate Change and the Crucial Role of Family Physicians

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The climate change is defined as a shift in global temperatures and climate patterns. These changes have been slow previously but are now happening at a faster and intense rate due to various factors. The World Health Organization has labeled this shift as a significant threat to human health throughout the globe [1].

Various factors have been seen to be responsible for this major shift in the pattern. These changes primarily are because of human activities that release various forms of damaging gasses into the air. One of the major contributors to this damage is the burning from fossil fuels for energy, which traps heat and increase temperature of the planet [2]. Chopping down of forests is another reason for more damage as less trees will affect the absorption of carbon dioxide and hence effect quality of clean air [3]. The problem is further worsened by pollution from various factories, smoke from vehicles and poor disposal of wastages [4]. Farming practices involving livestock and fertilizers also produce strong greenhouse gases further adding to this burden [5].

The impacts of climate change appear in the form of extreme weather events, including heat waves, heavy rains and floods, as well as earthquakes and landslides. These leads to disturbances of daily life activities along with huge impact on wellbeing including mental health. Elderly and younger children have a higher risk of contracting heat stroke and dehydration and other waterborne illnesses due to low immunity. Heavy rain and widespread flooding increase the risk of waterborne disease including cholera, typhoid, and gastroenteritis with higher mortality ratio especially in developing countries [6, 7].

These climate changes are no longer new but presenting in consultation rooms every day. Patients present with heat exhaustion, worsening asthma, waterborne infections including dengue, malaria, hepatitis etc. [8].

Family physicians are first point of contact for majority of the patients presenting with these complaints as they are working in close interactions with communities. They can identify how climate changes make life difficult for people who are already struggling with poverty, unsafe housing, and limited access to healthcare [9].

Role of a primary care physician is far beyond diagnosis and treatment. They can play a crucial role in addressing climate-related health challenges by educating and improving awareness of patients regarding lifestyle modification and opting for preventive measures to escape these environmental challenges [9].

Family physician can contribute through various ways mentioned as below:

- As trustable frontline healthcare providers, family physician can utilize their entrusted relationships with patients and communities to educate and guide them on climate related health risks and preventive measures [10].
- Family physicians can facilitate environment safety by using medical resources wisely, avoiding unnecessary tests and treatments including referrals and hence can reduce health-care related greenhouse gas emissions and environmental impact [10].
- Family physician organizations can collaborate with different family physician's groups to promote climate related health policies and develop educational resources for training purpose [11].
- A holistic and patient centered approach of family physicians can aid them to address mental health issues like anxiety and trauma due to environmental challenges and community disturbances [12].

Despite of having a major role in climate related illnesses many of the general physicians feel unprepared to deal with such issues as environmental health is rarely covered in medical school curriculum and busy clinicians have limited time to discuss it with patients [11].

Family physicians can be a climate leader if well equipped with training and workshop on climate change and associated challenges and hence minimize the harmful effects [9].

The following measures will help to address these issues:

- Integrate planetary health into medical education and training, empowering new physicians with the knowledge and skills to address climate related conditions, both physical and psychological [11].
- Encourage preventive care and reduce unnecessary tests or treatments to protect both patient health and the planet [10].
- Facilitate and lead community health to prepare for heat

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waves, poor air quality, and promote safe, sustainable ways to get around [9].

- Raising voice at institutional and policy levels, to intensify health related climate action aiming for systemic change in healthcare infrastructure and funding priorities to cater needs [11].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, addressing these challenges with active involvement from all stakeholders will not only strengthen environmental safety but also help communities prepare for better, more responsive healthcare.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Declared none.

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