

The Impact of Climate Change on Healthcare

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Dear Editor,

Climate change penetrates all levels of society. Recently, the dialogue of climate change has been growing in presence and shifting in ideas. In this letter we analyse the thoughts of medical students on climate change.

Climate change is no longer a hypothetical, distant or credibly deniable threat. The WHO estimates climate change will cause approximately two hundred and fifty thousand additional deaths per year between 2030 and 2050. Of these, thirty-eight thousand will be due to heat exposure in elderly people, forty-eight thousand due to diarrhoea, sixty thousand due to malaria, and ninety-five thousand due to childhood undernutrition ¹.

Anxiety is a growing complication of climate change. It has permeated all facets of society and will necessitate essential action for its dissolution. As future health care professionals we have a clear obligation to recognise this anxiety and to advocate on behalf of those most at risk. In particular, this abstract will focus on two key areas: the anxiety amongst those with potential environmental impacting illnesses, and the anxiety amongst those from less than favourable geography. Island and costal nations are some of those most at risk from this climate trajectory ². Unfortunately, we may be left with the destruction of homes, communities, and countries, and we will be catalyst for our eviction.

Healthcare waste management is an established challenge for many hospitals and healthcare systems. An increasing global reliance on single use plastics and equipment has produced many new issues in regard to the sustainability and environmental impact of the waste products disposal methods. On average, high-income countries generate up to 0.5 kg of hazardous waste per hospital bed per day ³. This perpetuates not only a moral obligation to reduce the waste produced but also a financial incentive.

The catastrophic effects of migration are evident worldwide. Adverse weather events have forced humans to migration, with number of people seeking asylum expected to increase by twenty-eight percent on the turn of the century⁴. As we live through a time of viruses, famine and food shortages how can we most effectively protect those whose livelihoods are most subject to the mercy of the weather? With this increased number of refugees and migrants, employment, food supply, transport, medicine and energy supply as we know it must evolve to provide for these people

It is evident that measures must be taken to educate and support doctors in tackling this crisis and thus improving patient care. Doctors must take a leadership role in educating themselves and the general population on these issues as well as advocating for legislation and government support.

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