

# Climate Change and Health

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That our planet's climate is changing is beyond doubt – as is the reason. The data and evidence for this is overwhelming and, increasingly, our everyday experience confirms it.<sup>1</sup> Practitioners of all disciplines will be affected by this as no disease, body system or speciality will avoid being impacted, and we need to prepare for this. Also, as advocates for the health of our patients, we need to be leading the fight against climate change.

I have recently been involved in writing a book about climate change and health aimed at the general reader.<sup>2</sup> Although I thought I was well versed in this area, I was shocked when I went through the most recent data. It is very hard to escape the conclusion that we are entering an era of existential threat to the humans that live on this planet.<sup>3</sup>

From the direct threats from floods, droughts, extreme wind events, earthquakes and wildfires to the more hidden threats from air pollution, famines, insect vectors moving, increased antibiotic resistance to conflicts and wars. All of these are already beginning to happen and in certain areas of the world, healthcare is being stretched to the limit. But climate change eventually affects us all and nowhere in the world will be safe. Thus, governments, healthcare systems, associations, hospitals, practices and practitioners all need to prepare for these effects.

Unfortunately, as we saw from COVID-19, none of the above agencies are very good at preparing – especially when current money needs to be spent on future healthcare. The economic pressures of modern care are hard enough to deal with today without paying for tomorrow. This reflects the attitude to climate change – that it's just too expensive to change our ways and avoid its worst effects. If, however, you look at the economics of both, you will see that not dealing with these issues now will be far more expensive in the future.<sup>4</sup> Continuing climate change is more than capable of bankrupting healthcare organisations, insurance companies and even entire countries.

As well as encouraging the organisations we work within to start preparing, we as practitioners, need to lead the debate. We are trusted by our patients, so we can positively influence them, and we are as responsible for their future health as we are for their current health. We need to lead by example – show our patients, colleagues, organisations that we take climate change seriously and are doing something about it. From walking to work, to ensuring recycling bins are in each clinic, to arranging virtual meetings instead of flying – we can all do our bit.

Inevitably you will think that you as an individual are tiny compared to the climate and the factors that are changing it. Of course, we are, but if we all act, then we can begin to make the changes that are necessary. Conversely, if you give up in despair faced with the enormity of the task, perhaps think about what you will say when your children and grandchildren ask, “what did you do?”

## Disclosure

The author has cited the book<sup>2</sup> he has written and may receive royalties from this book. The author reports no other conflicts of interest in this work.

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**Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare****Dovepress**

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