

Episode: *Author Interview: “We’re All Healthier Under a Starry Sky”*

Guest: Mario E. Motta, MD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Mario E. Motta, a cardiologist from Salem, Massachusetts, and former member of the Council of Science and Public Health and also a prior trustee of the AMA. He’s here to discuss his article, “*We’re All Healthier Under a Starry Sky*,” in the October 2024 issue of the Journal, [Sleep Stewardship](#). Dr Motta, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

DR MARIO MOTTA: Thank you. I appreciate being here, and I appreciate being on the podcast.

[00:00:46] HOFF: So, what’s the main ethics point of your article?

MOTTA: Human health is affected by light pollution, and it also affects the environment. And ethically we have an obligation to not just protect human health—which is why the AMA is concerned and involved with this issue—but also to protect the environment and world health as well. Deterioration of the environment will inadvertently affect human health in the long run, and we have an ethical obligation to help our environment be a better place.

[00:01:28] HOFF: And so, what’s the most important thing for health professions students and trainees specifically to take from this article?

MOTTA: To recognize that environmental damage can lead to human health concerns. We have good documentation now that excessive glare adversely affects elderly drivers so that they cannot drive properly in the streets, leading to excess number of accidents. We have very good data now, after 30 years of research with multiple articles being published, that melatonin suppression adversely affects human health and leading to increase in especially hormonally related carcinomas such as breast and prostate. Many well-referenced articles on those issues. And there are other more recent articles showing that pancreas, thyroid can also be affected as well as others. The melatonin suppression adversely affects our immune system leading to these problems. And then we have to recognize that in the environment as a whole, we are one species on the Earth. There are many other species, and there are multiple well-documented adverse

effects to other species, which we have a duty to protect. And light pollution adversely affects our environment.

[00:03:11] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

MOTTA: I would have loved to have more space to delve into the environmental damage that is occurring. There are numerous articles, and it's a burgeoning field of study now for many researchers. That's not the prime focus of our AMA concern, but it's related. [theme music returns] And again, I will emphasize the point that if we damage the environment, we are, in effect, damaging human health in the long run.

[00:03:54] HOFF: Dr Motta, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

MOTTA: My pleasure.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.