ART OF MEDICINE
Climate Change and Health Equity
Nealie Tan Ngo

Abstract
Physical environment, income, and access to education and food are all health determinants that situate whether, when, and to what extent patients or their communities have equitable access to wellness and health care services. Because climate change will likely exacerbate national and international health inequity, this comic considers our future.

Figure. Detail from Diagnosing Our Future

(Media
Adobe Draw, Adobe Photoshop, and Microsoft Word.

As current and future health care professionals, it can be easy for us to view climate change as an issue that is too far removed from our daily responsibilities. Our jobs...
center around medications and differentials, not greenhouse emissions and rising sea levels. It can be easy for us to turn a blind eye and say, “That’s someone else’s problem.” However, our calling as health care professionals does not make us immune to the consequences of climate change; our patients already are—and will continue to be—the victims of climate change. Our profession gives us the unique perspective of seeing many of the possible consequences of climate change—from re-emerging infectious diseases and toxic algae blooms to exacerbations of health conditions due to air pollution and food shortages.\textsuperscript{1,2,3}

As current and future health care professionals, we are in a position of responsibility, privilege, and power, and we need to add our voices to the climate change narrative. There has been—and will continue to be—a physical human toll due to climate change.\textsuperscript{1} The World Health Organization reports that between 2030 and 2050, climate change will be responsible for 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress.\textsuperscript{4} Furthermore, the direct damage costs to health is estimated to be between 2 to 4 billion USD per year by 2030.\textsuperscript{4}

As current and future health care professionals, we have an obligation to the public to take action on climate change—whether through climate advocacy, improving patient and medical student education,\textsuperscript{5,6,7} or even taking steps to help reduce the carbon footprint of the health care industry\textsuperscript{6,9}—because members of the public are our patients, and we are caretakers of their health.

Climate change is a public health crisis.\textsuperscript{10} As current and future health care professionals, we need to pay attention to it.

References


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