

Episode: *Author Interview: “Greener Health Care Is a Necessity”*

Guest: Brian Robert Smith

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript by: Cheryl Green

[Access the podcast.](#)

[bright theme music]

TIM HOFF (HOST): 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 Brian Smith, a second-year medical student at the Stanford University School of Medicine in Stanford, California. He’s here to discuss his article, “*Greener Health Care Is a Necessity*,” in the April 2023 issue of the Journal, [Meat and Health](#). Brian, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

BRIAN SMITH: Tim, thank you so much for having me.

HOFF: So, to begin with, what’s the ethics point of your piece? And longtime listeners of the podcast will notice I said “piece” and not “article,” because Brian’s contribution to the Journal this month is four pieces of digital artwork. So, Brian, what is the main ethics point of the pieces that you’re showing in this month’s issue?

SMITH: Yeah. So, the main point of my piece is to bring attention to the implications of our health care sector’s contribution to climate change and the sort of paradox that as we try to heal people, we can also have negative effects on our patients’ health. I was shocked to hear that the US health care system contributes to almost a 10th of our country’s total carbon emissions and a quarter of global health care emissions. So, through this series of four digital art pieces, I was trying to highlight this paradox of health care facilities that are trying to maintain and improve health but also can contribute to climate change. I think in the end, my goal is to put forward the point that we want to take a.... Sorry. I think moving forward, we need to take a more proactive role in reducing our carbon footprint and promoting sustainable practices because it’s best not only for our patients but for public health as well.

HOFF: And so, what do you see as the most important thing for your fellow health professions students and trainees to take from this article?

SMITH: I think it’s the need, first of all, to understand that no contribution is too small to be important, and that through the accumulation of many efforts, even if they’re small, we can make a big difference. Where I think people would resonate with is the idea that they can create big changes just in their wards or their floors, and that can over time build to their whole practice or their whole hospital. I also want people to be aware of the direct relationship between climate change and public health and the role that we as health care professionals can play to address this issue.

HOFF: This question, again, might not apply quite as neatly to digital art as it does to an article, but if there was a concept that you might have developed a little bit further in these pieces that you didn’t have the opportunity or time to, what would that be?

SMITH: Yeah, no, I think it totally makes sense to apply it to this piece here because there's only so many things you can address in a piece of artwork. And I think if I were to add an extra dimension to these pieces, I would want to explore the idea of how addressing this can be an extension of seeing health care as a team effort. And so, often, I hear as a medical student that health care is a team sport. And everyone from the technicians all the way through to the physicians, everyone there and in between, across specialties, disciplines, and roles, health care professionals can work together to identify the problems related to climate change and then implement solutions to reduce their practice, their specialty's carbon footprint, and to minimize the negative impact on the environment. [theme music returns] And in doing so, we'll actually be giving a gift to our patients as well.

HOFF: Brian, thank you so much for being on the podcast today and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

SMITH: Thank you so much, Tim. It was a pleasure.

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