

Planetary health: a call for action of family doctors from around the world^a

Saúde planetária: conclamação para a ação dos médicos de família de todo o mundo

Salud planetaria: Llamada a la acción de los médicos de familia de todo el mundo

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Abstract

WONCA, with the Planetary Health Alliance, issued a declaration calling family doctors of the world to act on planetary health. This commentary discusses environmental changes and the call in relation to the role of the family doctor in the perspective of planetary health.

Keywords: Environmental Health; Family Practice; Climate Change

Resumo

A WONCA, em conjunto com a Planetary Health Alliance, lançou uma conclamação para a ação dos MFCs do mundo pela saúde planetária. Este comentário discute os efeitos das mudanças ambientais e a conclamação em relação o papel do médico de família na perspectiva da saúde planetária.

Palavras-chave: Saúde Ambiental; Medicina de Família e Comunidade; Mudança Climática

Resumen

WONCA, junto con la Planetary Health Alliance, lanzó un llamamiento a la acción de los médicos de familia del mundo por la salud planetaria. Este comentario discute los efectos de los cambios ambientales y el llamamiento y el papel del médico de familia en la perspectiva de la salud planetaria.

Palabras clave: Salud Ambiental; Medicina Familiar y Comunitaria; Cambio Climático

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*When the next generation asks us, "What did you do about climate change?,"
we want to have a good answer.¹*

In 2017, the World Organization of Family Doctors (WONCA) published the WONCA Declaration on Planetary Health and Sustainable Development Goals,² a major institutional landmark raising Planetary Health to a priority area for family doctors. Since then, scientific evidences of impacts of environmental pollution on human health have consolidated.

Presently, we know that pollution-caused diseases were responsible for about 9 million premature deaths in 2015, more than three times the deaths caused by aids, malaria and tuberculosis.³ Extending our look even further, we observe that the natural systems (climate, land, oceans, biodiversity, etc.) that support the human health are quickly deteriorating, becoming evident that an urgent action is necessary to prevent that this imminent collapse leads to the reversion of the improvement in global health trends in the last decades. Therefore, WONCA, in joint with the Planetary Health Alliance, launched a claim for action of family doctors around the world for planetary health.⁴ Being general practitioners linked to people's daily life and used to deal with equity issues in health and to separate the wheat from the chaff, it is not a surprise that we are leading and sounding the global alarm for the need for action in planetary health and climate change.⁵

The ineffective and insufficient response to the climate changes put human life at risk.^{4,6-8} Events related to the climate, as floods and droughts, have been associated with more than 90% of all the disasters in the whole world in the past 20 years.⁶ Also, in the Brazilian context, infectious diseases like dengue have their vectorial capacity potentialized by climatic changes. Between 1950 and 2010, the vectorial capacity of *Aedes aegypti* had an increase of 5.8%, while it increased 11.2% for *Aedes albopictus*.⁸ Air pollution is one of the major causes of death and incapacity in the whole world, being estimated that around 52 thousand people died in Brazil in 2015 due to the exposition to pollution of environmental air.^{3,8} In the world, 90% of the cities breathe polluted air that is toxic to the cardiovascular and respiratory system.⁷ The stress caused by heat is another great issue in our country; between 2014 and 2015, the heat waves lasted longer in Brazil and this can be more harmful especially for elderly people, children, pregnant women and people with chronic diseases.^{6,7}

Planetary health can be defined as a field that investigates the interdependence between health of the planet's natural systems and the health of the human civilization. It is aimed to develop and evaluate solutions based on evidences to safeguard an equitable, sustainable and healthful world.² In this sense, the Declaration's question⁴ "Why should family doctors care about planetary health?" places the family doctors acting next to their communities as basic actors both in the mitigation and in the adaptation to environmental problems, searching to potentialize the health of patients with measures that promote co-benefits to the environment, such as stimulating active transportation and healthful food mainly with a focus on a diet based on plants,^{9,10} among others. Mcwhinney,¹¹ a major thinker of our medical discipline, used to speak of the physicians' crucial role in the advocacy of healthy environment for his patients. Finally, if we reflect on the classic attributes of the PHC, according to Barbara Starfield,¹² we will perceive that the derived attributes induce us to gradually extend our look to the family, the community, the culture. Thus, why not to the natural systems that sustain us?

Global challenges need global answers. Therefore, WONCA – representing around 500 thousand family doctors in the entire world – is a very significant force in the tackling and leadership for health of our communities and our planet. However, this formidable power will only be effective if we are familiar and committed with Planetary Health in our daily life.

Conflict of interests

None declared.

Contribution from the authors

Conception and/or design of the study: MF, ECF. Data gathering, analysis or interpretation: MF, ECF. Preliminary draft: MF, ECF. Critical review of the preliminary draft: MF, ECF.

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