

Georgetown researcher on climate change: Reduce contribution, care for victims, advocate

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Physicians and nurses have a role if not "a moral and professional responsibility to act" to help to reduce climate change and help those impacted, say the authors of "Climate Change & Health: Is There a Role for the Health Care Sector?," published by the Catholic Health Association of the United States. Its authors, including Laura Anderko, PhD, RN, the Robert and Kathleen Scanlon Chair in Values Based Health Care at the School of Nursing & Health Studies at Georgetown University Medical Center, explore the crossroads of climate change, the environment and health, and issue a call for action to coincide with Earth Day, April 22.

Anderko and co-authors Stephanie Chalupka, EdD, RN, PhD, PHCNS-BC, FAAOHN of Worcester State University and Brenda M. Afzal, RN, MS, say [health care](#) providers should consider ways of reducing their contribution to the problem, care for those who are victims and advocate for public policies and private actions that will bring solutions.

Throughout the essay, the authors cite multiple scientific reports supporting climate change and the strong potential for harm to human health.

"Children, pregnant women, older adults and the poor are typically more susceptible to illness associated with heat and extreme weather events, as well as waterborne, vector-borne and food-borne illness," the authors, all

nurse researchers, write.

One potentially disastrous example the authors give is the ability of mosquitoes, as vectors of malaria, to thrive in warmth. "With as little as a two degree change in temperature, an additional one billion people will be living in the malaria transmission zone," the authors write.

Other health impacts of climate change include poor birth outcomes (air pollution and heat); malnutrition; water quality, scarcity and disease; respiratory diseases; premature death; and psychological impacts particularly following a natural disaster.

Anderko and her colleagues say climate change will cause profound challenges for humanity in the coming decades. "Health care providers and health care facilities will be on the front line in dealing with the impacts of climate change."

"As trusted conveyors of health information for patients, community members, and policy makers, [physicians](#) and [nurses](#) have a role and some might say a moral and professional responsibility to act."

Anderko and her colleagues say health care providers can help address the problem of climate change and its impacts on the health and welfare of people worldwide, especially the vulnerable by:

- Reducing the contribution to the problem by decreasing energy usage, reducing emissions and waste and rethinking food service such as serving less meat and buying locally to reduce long-distance food distribution;
- Caring for those who are victims of climate events, being vigilant to the effects of extreme temperatures especially for the very old and young, focusing on respiratory and other health problems

- that are accelerated by climate change; and
- Advocating for policies and practices that will help to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The authors conclude, "[Climate change](#) provides an opportunity to act with courage and creativity as individuals, as people of faith, as a nation."

More information: A PDF of "Climate Change and Health: Is There a Role for the Health Care Sector?" is available:

www.chausa.org/climatechangerelease/

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