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February 2020



Your monthly dose of *good news* about climate change.

If you know a doctor or someone who's played one on TV, or *if you know anyone in health care*, this issue is for you. They are frontline witnesses to how climate change harms patients, and we are sharing words of wisdom about climate resilience in clinical practice.

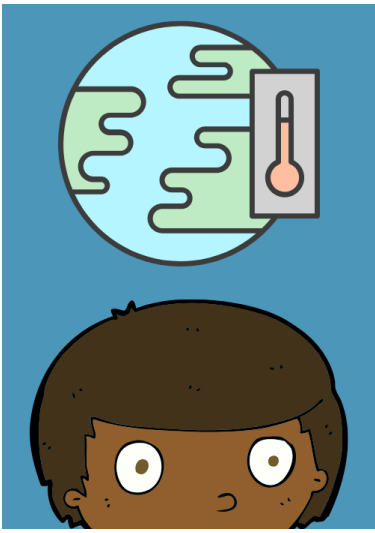
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Climate Change in the Exam Room

- A 4-year old girl with her third asthma attack in a week due to unusually high pollen levels.
- A 27-year old man who developed end-stage kidney disease caused by working long, too-hot days on sugar farms in El Salvador.
- A Hurricane Maria survivor who made her way to Boston with a bag of empty medicine bottles, begging for refills.
- An elderly man whose top-floor apartment became so hot he was treated for a 106-degree temperature.

This is what climate change looks like in the exam room. The connection may not always be obvious, but [like Jack](#)



Nicholson wandering through a hospital , once you see it you can't unsee it.

Climate Crisis = Health Crisis

This month we co-hosted [ClimateRx2020](#) , bringing together all of Boston's teaching hospitals for the first time to talk about how climate change affects clinical practice, and how the medical community can respond.



Co-hosted with the New England Journal of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, and Harvard Global Health Institute, [this was the first of eight similar events](#) across the U.S. and Australia. [Watch the recording here](#) .

We're sharing key takeaways and how to [create your own Climate Crisis = Health Crisis button](#) , which 9 out of 10 doctors agree was really the best part of the whole shebang. (Disclaimer: The lead author of this newsletter also adapted the design of the button.)

Adapting Clinical Practice to Climate Change

Climate change makes it more challenging for clinicians to do their jobs, but we have solutions.



Expect the unexpected. Climate change makes it harder to diagnose patients as diseases such as cholera and lyme disease crop up where they haven't been before. Learning patients' histories, promoting trust in vaccines, and asking patients where they have traveled can help. So can hiding emergency chocolate in your speculum drawer, but that's an editorial comment endorsed only by yours truly.

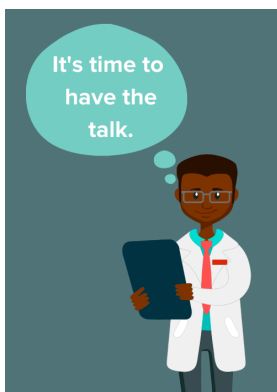
Educate patients about heatwaves. Extreme heat makes some medications less effective or more dangerous: Albuterol inhalers and epipens left in hot cars could stop working; some drugs for depression, heart disease, and kidney failure could cause heat-related illness. Patients who depend on equipment such as nebulizers need a back up plan in case the electricity goes out. Knowledge is power!

Consider local demographics and health care infrastructure. Natural disasters can disrupt life-saving treatment. If hospitals and treatment centers for chemotherapy or dialysis stop functioning in climate emergencies, patients can't receive the care that they need.

Talk to your peers. Implementing solutions requires collaborations between health systems that have already experienced threats from climate change, according to our [ClimateMD](#) leader and ER Doc, Renee Salas. Read her perspective in the New England Journal of Medicine on [The Climate Crisis and Clinical Practice](#).

How Doctors Can Tackle Climate Change

At the heart of being a doctor is taking complex science and making it relevant to people's lives, and this skill is at the top of the list when it comes to making climate change personal and actionable.



Talk climate during a clinical visit. "It's like any other sensitive issue," said Dr. Lucy Marcil, a Boston Medical Center pediatrician. "Like sex. If we don't talk about it, we send a signal that it's okay not to talk about it." For you GenXers out there, we know what [Salt-n-Pepa](#) have to say about that. And while you're talking, [skip the jargon](#) and get right to the good stuff.

Educate patients about what climate change looks like at home. Mention climate change when it's too hot to be safe outside, or the pollen counts are so high they cause allergy and asthma attacks.

Help patients feel less paralyzed by suggesting creative, concrete actions they can take. If they have a climate-sensitive condition, explain how climate policies can protect their health.

Connect pollution, climate change, and health. Sometimes knowing the connection can be therapeutic for a patient. If a patient lives near a busy roadway, asthma flare ups may be linked to the same pollution causing global warming. Similarly, there are associations between children living near busy roads with an increased risk of obesity.

Speak publicly about how climate impacts health. Contact elected officials, serve as expert witnesses, and take part in public protests.

But ... But ... But ...

What if a doctor is on the fence about bringing up climate change?



When it comes to health, climate change is a root cause, not a divisive issue. According to our panelists, for too long doctors have been hesitant to admit that this association clearly exists.

"We can talk about trends without having to put ourselves in a spot of attributing a specific hospitalization to climate change," said pulmonologist Mary Rice.

[Hear more about how Dr. Rice talks about climate with her patients.](#)

The "Terrible Band of Superheroes" We Never Knew We Needed

It's okay to call them that if they called themselves that first.

Health care administrators and academics share how to take the first step towards climate resilience within your organization:



Photo: James Mahoney for Coverage.

"The bureaucrat wanted to call a meeting. The CEO wanted manageable action steps. The head of an academic department wanted a task force. We're like a terrible band of superheroes"

**BERNARD JONES, VP
PUBLIC POLICY, BRIGHAM
AND WOMEN'S HOSPITAL**



- **Call a meeting of like-minded individuals.** Start by getting people together who care, gain a collective voice, get someone to be a spokesperson to present ideas to leadership.
- **Suggest actionable solutions with manageable steps.** This is a big issue and people want a big answer. But change doesn't happen that way. Encourage people to do small things that visibly make a difference.
- **Appoint a task force.** Find champions for things—people who really have energy for the issues and will carry them through.

Terrible *but awesome* ! We think they have some ideas worth listening to.

Climate Stories to Help You Sleep at Night



[How to be more optimistic](#)
For the love of God, read it.



[A best-case scenario for climate in 2050](#)
The air is moist and fresh!!

Hang Out With Us This Spring & Summer

April: 50th Anniversary of Earth Day Event

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day, we're hosting a half-day symposium on April 15. Christiana Figueres, Gina McCarthy and Gina Raimondo are featured speakers. We'll cover how to tackle the climate crisis to address our health emergency.

[Learn more](#)



July: Calling all high school climate warriors!

We're hosting a summer camp July 25-August 2 with Putney Pre-College! High schoolers will learn how to turn their ideas into action by learning the science behind global warming and how to become climate leaders. Share with the high schoolers in your life.

[Learn more](#)



Your Voting Checklist

We're just going to go ahead and leave this here until November, in case you know someone who could use it.



Check your registration status
(30 sec)



Register to vote
(2 min)



Get your absentee ballot
(2 min)



Get election reminders
(15 sec)



Pledge to register, get reminder on your 18th birthday.
(15 sec)

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