

WHY HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS ARE CRITICAL TO ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AT COP28

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Health professionals are a trusted voice – a voice that is becoming increasingly critical to addressing the health impacts of climate change. Not only are health professionals on the front line when it comes to treating these health impacts, they are also increasingly becoming advocates for public policy changes, at a local, national and international level. Looking towards this year's COP28 climate negotiations in Dubai, health professionals are finally going to take central stage as health becomes a priority in terms of the climate change agenda. The advent of the first ever Health Day at the COP28 UN Climate Conference in Dubai, suggests that the international community is increasingly recognizing the pivotal role health professionals play when it comes to human health and climate change. The crucial question now becomes, how can the international community leverage health professionals and inform the global population in terms of the risks climate change poses to human health.

Health professionals understand the complexities of human health but even they need to be educated in terms of the interaction between health, climate, health policy and economics. As a trusted voice they have an influential role in forging relationships between people, communities, governments, and healthcare systems. It is to be hoped that healthcare professionals will increasingly have a greater say in climate negotiations to advocate for climate change policies that protect human health. Healthcare professionals can also advocate for more equitable climate action and for mechanisms that focus on those most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change.

As we move forward to COP28 in Dubai and beyond, healthcare professionals across the globe need to step up, both in terms of their own education on climate change, as well as in terms of advocating for climate action to protect their patients. Health advocacy will be critical to the success of this year's COP28. But in a highly polarized and politically charged world, many healthcare professionals

may question their effectiveness as educators and advocates for health-directed climate change policies. The emphasis on health at COP28 serves to highlight the increasing need for involvement, despite the ongoing challenges and hurdles. It is clear however that the movement towards recognition in the field of climate medicine is well underway. Professional organizations as well as healthcare systems are already advocating for policies and actions that would minimize the carbon footprint of healthcare providers, mitigate against the weather extremes associated with climate change and help vulnerable communities adapt to the health challenges posed by climate change. From the local, national and international level, healthcare professionals play an increasingly vocal and engaged role in addressing climate change to protect human health. COP28 presents a unique opportunity for healthcare professionals from around the globe to come together to advocate for human health and to elevate the debate over climate change to focus those most vulnerable in our global community.