Global Warming, Health Disparities, and Structural Racism

History of previous crises involving heat waves and smoke waves has long been in the public eye. In the context of ongoing climate change, the notion of what we could call “normal” has been turned inside out. The health impacts of global warming, the roots and manifestations of COVID-19 infection, and structural racism are all connected by the ways in which these systems of oppression are not mutually exclusive but rather mutually reinforcing. In recognition of the interactions among environmental, socioeconomic, and structural determinants of public health, the UCSF Program on Reproductive Health and Environment is proud to present the NorCal Symposium on Climate and Pandemic Resilience in Health Care. According to Chelsea:

Dr. Chelsea Landolin, RN, MS, NP
Academic Senate Ad Hoc Committee on Sustainability
HS Assistant Clinical Professor

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The NorCal Symposium on Climate and Pandemic Resilience in Health Care will feature four days of virtual workshops, lightning talks, and leadership panels that will center on advocacy, reducing health sector emissions and health threats. Even the escalating acute events, such as killer heat waves in India, Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, and the enormous fires in Australia and the Amazon have not led to a collective intake of breath… and a reset of business as usual.

However, it has also provided a glimpse of what collective, aggressive action can accomplish in short order. In a nod to how quickly mother nature responds, the shelter-in-place efforts over several weeks resulted in a glorious blue sky around the Taj Mahal, disappearance of nitrogen dioxide pollution on satellite images, and wild animals testing new territory. Videos of rising sea waters and migrating insect vectors rarely make headline news. Manifestations of global warming are too often obscured by the satellite images of our shared future. Yet, the lifting of lockdowns has led to a collective awareness of the carbon footprint we have left behind.

Our readers have strong ties to health disparities, solutions can be designed to maximize positive outcomes for all of them. By recognizing that global warming contributes to the emergence of pandemics, and that both of these challenges are being exacerbated by reducing greenhouse gas output. This is just one example of how solutions to global warming are also solutions to health disparities.

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