The carbon footprints of obesity, chronic disease and population growth: four things doctors can do

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ABSTRACT
- Obesity, ill health and global warming are linked.
- The risks to health of climate change have been well articulated but have not been accompanied by clear policy and effective action.
- Four areas where doctors can and should act, and where changes will benefit both the environment and human health in the short-to-medium term are:
  ➤ reduction in the adverse environmental impact of the health care industry;
  ➤ development of a nationwide comprehensive food and nutrition policy that takes account of the entire food production cycle;
  ➤ urban redesign to encourage active transport; and
  ➤ more support for sexual and reproductive health services in developing countries.
- Finally, climate change policies should be assessed for their impact on global health and equity.

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hospital: energy efficiency; green building design; alternative electricity generation; greener and healthier transport for staff and patients; nutritious food that is locally and sustainably grown; safe alternatives to bottled water.

Food production policy and urban design
A critical look at two areas — agri-industry (including food supply and pricing policies) and urban design that facilitates active transport (walking, cycling and public transit) — shows how change can improve the national energy balance while increasing access to healthy and affordable food. Food production needs to be environmentally sustainable, and local production of healthy foods should be given priority in pricing and other policies. A broad, whole-of-government commitment to a comprehensive food and nutrition policy that addresses food quality, safety and security, rather than the current narrow focus on food labelling and industry-driven agendas, is needed.

Municipal planning rules need upgrading to make climate change mitigation measures enforceable. Energy-efficient building design and construction, more green spaces and fewer urban “heat islands”, pedestrian- and cyclist-friendly corridors and services location, and energy-efficient public transport would mitigate some climate effects and also improve urban amenity, reduce obesity and promote physical fitness and wellbeing. In much the same way as the health-driven regulation of smoking in public spaces, use of seatbelts and alcohol consumption by drivers has now become “normal”, so policy change to promote healthy food
Competing interests

None identified.

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References