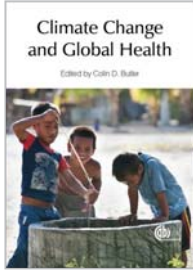


# Attention: this is a storm warning



**Climate change and global health.** Colin D Butler, editor. Wallingford, UK: CABl, 2014 (328 pp, US \$144). ISBN 9781780642659.

**THERE ARE MOMENTS** in medical history when the evidence compels doctors to do something strange, to go against the prevailing wisdom. Imagine how odd it must have been to be a colleague of Ignaz Semmelweis when he was proposing that you should wash your hands before delivering a baby. Or to watch John Snow trashing the water pump in the midst of a cholera epidemic.

*Climate change and global health*, edited by Colin Butler, is similarly challenging. It outlines the current state of the evidence across a wide range of the science on the likely health effects of climate change. It takes a *global* rather than an *international* health perspective, so it looks at worldwide outcomes, rather than being country specific.

The book opens with two masterly overviews, one by Will Steffen and the second by the late Tony McMichael, titled (and reflecting his life work) “Climate change and global health”. Twenty eight chapters follow, considering primary effects — due to severe weather patterns; secondary effects — from changes to disease vectors and crops; and tertiary effects from social and economic consequences.

The authors, all leading researchers in their fields, set out the evidence convincingly, as well as the current areas of uncertainty, and are not afraid to let the reader know their opinion.

One section outlines regional problems, another chapter describes research methods for assessing and

preventing health consequences, and other chapters concern successful health activism. In short, there is something for everyone interested in climate change and health, including those wanting a comprehensive reference text, public health researchers, and advocates and activists.

I was struck by how little of this appears in medical education curricula, so perhaps a second edition could include a chapter on teaching about the impact of climate on health.

For the most part, the book is a dispassionate, technical exposition of the research, which makes it all the more shocking when the passion for action becomes visible. Not acting now, we are told, could lead to “an enforced and unpleasant change, following a time of turmoil that may make the Dark Ages seem desirable” (p 289) — a sentiment that cannot be dismissed as mere hyperbole.

The authors make it clear that action is urgent on purely health grounds, let alone all the other reasons. The concluding chapter, “Climate change and health: from adaptation towards a solution”, reminds us that there are essential conversations for us to join and actions to be taken. Semmelweis and Snow are watching.

**Tim Senior**

General Practitioner  
Sydney, NSW

doi: 10.5694/mja14.01615

---

Tim Senior is a member of Doctors for the Environment Australia and the winner of the inaugural Gavin Mooney Memorial Essay Competition last year for his essay “Climate change and equity, whose language is it anyway?”.