

## Re: Physicians, Climate Change & Human Health

To the Editor,

I congratulate you for having chosen a very pertinent topic for your Message from the Editor-in-Chief, in the July 2008 issue of SQUMJ.<sup>1</sup> This is a global issue which has vast and long term effects on everyone in every region of the world. It is even more gratifying to note that you want physicians in all capacities to be aware of the issue and contribute to solutions in whatever capacity that they can.

Perhaps an equally if not more important theme and, in my opinion, the most important health matter today from the prevention point of view, is that of unhealthy lifestyles. This is again an issue of worldwide importance, but of special significance to this region and this country in particular where we are experiencing a flood of its after-effects. Vast masses of the population, especially young children and youth are being adversely affected by this scourge, due probably to wealth and easy access to every amenity of life, many of which are not being used judiciously. It is therefore of special relevance to all physicians with the need for them to be pro-active rather than reactive.

Lifestyle is important to us as individuals, families and as communities, as we all in our turn contribute to overall national health. Unfortunately, this subject has not yet been the focus of any World Health Day. Unhealthy lifestyles are perhaps equally if not much more dangerous and devastating than climate change, especially for our most vital resource, our new generation, which carries the hopes and aspirations of every country. If the effects of climate change will affect the lives of millions, unhealthy lifestyles trap billions. Every branch of medicine will face the consequences and they will pose a gradually increasing burden and challenge for them in the coming decades, with, unfortunately, with little hope of successful solutions, if present trends continue and the world clings to unhealthy lifestyles as the dearest, most cherished and attractive thing on earth.

Excuse me for my rather strongly expressed sentiments, but this is a reality and it needs expressing in clear and strong words for the world and to those who can make the most difference: parents, teachers and doctors, all of whom are presently playing a rather passive instead of a strong and proactive role.

In Oman and other Gulf states, we already have certain adverse factors, such as a high proportion of consanguinity and genetic defects which gives us little chance of escape from many health problems. We therefore have no choice but to choose, establish and propagate this golden option: a healthy lifestyle. This is a strong, cost-effective preventive strategy against the fury of many modern diseases, many of them incurable and life-long afflictions which top the global list of causes of morbidity and mortality and to which we are unfortunately and helplessly both succumbing and contributing.

This region has innumerable risks and dangers knocking at its door, waiting to enter and afflict the lives of us and our families. We can and have imported the best hospitals of the world, but this will never improve the overall general health of the nation. Hospitals are meant for the sick and those who are lucky enough to be aware of their disease and have it detected. Unawareness of health problems has unfortunately become rampant in the modern world, even though we are saturated with information and information technology. We know everything that goes on in the most distant corners of the world, but give little importance and time to what is going on within our bodies and our families.

In Oman, we have provided the very best of everything to our most loved ones, our children, right from birth, keeping them safe and on the road to health. Why do we then allow them as they grow older to take on our unhealthy lifestyle, most of it imported from the knowledgeable West, and allow them to contribute further to our already high national health risks? Why do we allow them detour off the road to health and safety? This is exactly what we are doing, of course unknowingly and maybe unintentionally. Are they immune to the health risks of adult life? Do they have to experience the same fate as we and others and run these risks till their old age and death?

Can we not change the present environment and scenario? Why cannot we as parents, teachers and doctors be good, healthy and responsible role models so making a healthy lifestyle a social norm and a mass movement? We certainly can do it if we control our gradually increasing desires, strengthen our will power and, most important of all, give deep and serious thought to the future of our children, our families and our nation.

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**REFERENCES**

1. Al Lamki L. Physicians, Climate Change and Human Health - Message from Editor-in-Chief. SQU Med J 2008; 8:125-127