The Climate Crisis Affects Us All

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In this issue of JAMA Dermatology, Atwoli et al highlight the upcoming 27th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is taking place in Africa this year, as an opportunity to focus on the health impacts of the climate crisis with a focus on disparities. The authors highlight the myriad of health implications both observed and anticipated due to the climate crisis, while discussing both moral and additional practical reasons why medical professionals across the globe should focus on the climate crisis. Their article is essential reading for all physicians—including dermatologists.

Dermatology sits within the broader house of medicine, and dermatologists are affected by the climate crisis both as physicians and as inhabitants of a rapidly changing planet. There is a growing body of literature highlighting the impact of climate change on patients, including a Special Issue on Climate Change & Dermatology published in the January 2021 issue of the International Journal of Women's Dermatology. A warming planet has shifted habitats of disease-transmitting vectors, with increases in the geographic range of ticks and associated tick-borne illnesses, as well as formerly equatorial vector-borne infections now becoming endemic in the continental US (eg, leishmaniasis). Airborne particulate matter released from the combustion of fossil fuels, as well as due to consequences of climate changes such as increased wildfires, has been associated with worsening of chronic inflammatory skin diseases such as atopic dermatitis. A recent survey of practicing dermatologists highlighted that more than 99% agreed that climate change is occurring, with more than three-quarters agreeing that it is affecting their patients. Notably, 82% responded that they would like to read more about climate change in scientific journals.

Recent events, including the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 and the global spread of monkeypox, have driven home that we all exist together in one connected world. The health care sector is a key source of carbon emissions and contributor to climate change, and the patients and populations we serve are affected by the ongoing climate crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated some technological advances that have the potential to reduce the climate impact of our essential work, such as widespread use of telemedicine and the adoption of hybrid and virtual conferences. It is imperative for dermatologists to keep abreast of the dermatologic-specific ramifications and be aware of the broader health impacts of climate change. It is essential, too, to consider climate change beyond just its impact on clinical care and patterns of cutaneous disease, but also more broadly in terms of the climate impacts of our practice and profession. There are many opportunities to take meaningful action, such as reducing travel-related carbon emissions, improving energy efficiency in offices, and exploring strategic investing or divestment as individuals and medical societies. The climate crisis is a global issue and requires us all to remain educated and take action. We would encourage all to read carefully the words of Atwoli et al, and we are proud of JAMA Dermatology for highlighting the climate crisis through this lens.

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Disclaimer: The views in this article are those of the authors and do not represent the American Academy of Dermatology.