Notes from Climate Change Conference

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On Saturday January 12, 2019, the New York City Academy of Medicine hosted a one-day CME conference on Clinical Climate Change: Patients, Populations and Providers and the Impacts of Global Warming. Developed by the Department of Environmental Medicine and Public Health at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, the conference highlighted some new findings on the human health impacts of climate change. While the worst effects of climate change are felt by poor people in developing countries who are less resilient to droughts, floods, and heat, conference speakers cited multiple examples of climate change affecting the health of vulnerable U.S. populations:

- Increased asthma-related health problems and emergency room visits in children
- Longer summer heat waves that increase mortality, particularly among elderly and poor people, residents of urban heat islands, and people with mental illness
- Higher temperatures increase ozone levels, compromising lung function and exacerbating asthma
- Earlier and longer pollen seasons elevating exposure to allergens, increasing allergic sensitization and asthma episodes
- Rise in waterborne-disease outbreaks and vector borne diseases such as Lyme disease and West Nile virus
- Extreme weather events can cause stress and anxiety, exacerbating depression and other mental illnesses

However, healthcare is not only affected by climate change; the practice of healthcare in the US also has a big impact on global warming. According to a new report published in the January 17, 2019 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, the carbon foot print of the U.S. health care sector, if it were its own country, would be the seventh most greenhouse gas-polluting entity in the world. But healthcare is also positioned to play a leading role in addressing climate change. Conference speaker and practicing Emergency Medicine physician, Dr. Amy Collins. Dr Collins serves as a Senior Clinical Advisor to **Health Care Without Harm**, an international nongovernmental organization (NGO) working to transform health care worldwide and reduce its environmental footprint. The group partners with major health systems, health ministries, medical device manufacturers, and others to find ecologically sound alternatives to health care practices that pollute the environment and contribute to disease.

Climate change is getting increasingly complicated. So, how do we adequately inform ourselves to clearly communicate the impact of climate change without reinforcing misperceptions that the problem only matters at some distant point in the future for people who live far away? Suggestions from the conference's panel discussion on communicating about climate change include the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which provides online materials for anyone seeking to communicate about the health impacts of climate change to a range of audiences. For ideas on how to reduce your environmental footprint, the EPA also has information on greener living.