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GLOBAL WARMING AS A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

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Summary

Introduction. Over the past 100 years, the global average air temperature has increased by about 1°F (or 0.2°C), increasing twice as fast as observed during any period of the past 1,000 years. This is confirmed by: the shrinking of the Arctic ice cap, melting of glaciers and thawing of permafrost. Global warming is a subject of scientific discussions and directly affects human health. The purpose of the study is to demonstrate that the various consequences of global warming – from extreme weather events to the spread of infectious diseases – have direct and indirect effects on the physical and mental health of people around the world, as well as on the functionality of the healthcare system.

Material and methods. The current study is an evaluation of the scientific literature on the research topic. A search strategy was developed using scientific articles and best practice guidelines such as PubMed and Wiley Online Library databases from the last 10 years.

Results. Extreme heat contributes to sea level rise, causes floods and droughts in various environmental situations, leads to severe hurricanes and as a result can directly cause injury, malnutrition, non-communicable and communicable diseases and even death. The effects of global warming can also affect human health through environmental changes. For example, maintaining air pollution levels can negatively influence respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Changes in temperature and precipitation can affect the survival, distribution and behaviour of insects and other species, as well as cause changes in infectious diseases, affect mental health and well-being.

Extreme weather events can lead to accidents/events resulting in traumatic injury, heat stress and even death. Rising temperature affects almost all human systems: it affects kidney function, increases the risk of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, mental health, more frequent infections and impaired wound healing.

Health professionals face the health risks of global warming more acutely than the general population. Global warming not only disrupts their lives but also makes their jobs more difficult, increasing the risk of burnout. Extreme weather events often prevent them from travelling to health care facilities. As more people become sick due to global warming, so will the need for a larger and well-trained workforce for climate challenges.

Viewing global warming through a health lens helps convey the urgent need for action and the duty of health organisations to intervene to avoid preventable harm. Public health organisations need to speak up and take meaningful action to reduce climate risks, save lives and promote a more sustainable future.

Conclusions. Global warming is now a mainstream issue and must be positioned as a public health issue. It is important that health workers and managers in the health system understand the effects of global warming and support policies and practices that will decrease and mitigate the process of global warming, implement measures to prevent adverse effects, acclimatize the population and adapt the system of health to the phenomenon of global warming.

Keywords: global warming, impact of warming, public health, greenhouse gas