

New Planetary Health Task Force



CANADIAN
RHEUMATOLOGY
ASSOCIATION

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DE RHUMATOLOGIE



The Canadian Rheumatology Association (CRA) is working to address the environmental concerns highlighted by its members with a new Planetary Health Task Force. In the past year, members and their communities have been affected by floods and the record-breaking wildfire season.

Chaired by CRA Vice-President Dr. Stephanie Tom, the CRA Planetary Health Task Force members are Drs. Sasha Bernatsky, Claire Barber, Beth Hazel, Philip Baer, Fergus To, and Molly Dushnicky.

The Task Force's mandate is to support members to incorporate planetary health principles into their practices. Research has shown that the healthcare sector has a comparable and likely even higher carbon footprint than the aviation industry in Canada and globally.

"Given the impact of environment on human health, we have a natural role to play as health advocates," says Dr. Tom, citing examples of Yellowknife Hospital's evacuation due to wildfires and patients' interstitial lung disease (ILD) exacerbations this past summer. "These environmental changes really challenge our healthcare systems' resilience and our ability as physicians to provide longitudinal patient care."

The Task Force will build on the work done by the Ontario Rheumatology Association (ORA) which created the world's first rheuma-

tology sustainability toolkit, (available at ontariorheum.ca/planetary-health-rheumatology-toolkit-now-available), which is an easy-to-read implementation guide to greening rheumatology practice spaces, including clinics and infusion centres. There is already a separate toolkit for those who work in hospitals and long-term care settings.

The CRA aims to develop an updated bilingual toolkit to be shared more widely among the national rheumatology community for feedback and ideas.

"Ultimately, planetary health in medicine is about the triple bottom line," says Dr. Tom. "Ensuring quality patient care, concern for the environment, and cost savings to the system and even individual clinics."

Some examples of addressing our healthcare carbon footprint include adopting Choosing Wisely principles, deprescribing, streamlining personal protective equipment (PPE) use, sharps containers and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastics recycling, and incorporating relevant patient risk factors during assessments.

The Planetary Health Task Force looks forward to engaging and supporting members in greening their workspaces. Updates on the work of the Task Force will be shared as they become available. If you have any questions, feedback, or ideas, please email info@rheum.ca.

