

Sustainability in Medical Education

By Beth Hazel, OLY, MDCM, FRCPC, MM

Planetary health is on everyone's minds. We worry about the future of our planet and try to make individual changes to improve outcomes, but we all recognize that broad-based changes are the most impactful.

It is not surprising that the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada's new strategic plan features a section on championing planetary health and sustainable health care. It calls upon its members to promote environmentally sustainable health care as part of our responsibility to future generations and to the long-term stability of Canada's health system. They recognize that specialist physicians and health care teams can play a unique role as stewards of sustainable health care and advocates for the health of populations, including systemically marginalized groups who may be more significantly impacted by climate change.

To support planetary health and sustainable health care, the Royal College's goals include:

- Development and curation of planetary health and sustainable health care learning resources
- Collaboration with other organizations to define and support the role of specialist physicians in planetary health

To this end, they have recognized the importance of adding planetary health and sustainable health care to the academic curriculum of residency programs. In the new version of the CanMEDs framework, teaching and assessment of competencies related to environmental stewardship will be embedded as training requirements and will be subject to accreditation surveillance.

Within the Royal College's own mission to support planetary health and sustainable health care, they are reviewing the impacts of exam delivery and are considering how to minimize travel and reduce the carbon footprint associated with conducting formal exams. In addition, they are working to improve stewarding of resources by reviewing their corporate social responsibilities with the goal of developing a corporate social responsibility framework.

They have curated some practical steps specialists like us can take to reduce environmental harm at work and produced a series of YouTube Videos called "This planet has two minutes."

Finally, the Royal College is looking to support passionate groups, like our own CRA Taskforce, by sponsoring projects and contributing to a planetary health coalition of members and partner organizations.

When we teach a new skill to our trainees, we say that the key to mastery is to "see one, do one, teach one." When it comes to saving our planet that same philosophy applies, but we are all students, teachers and role models. And this is part of our lifelong learning journey.

*Elizabeth M. Hazel, OLY, MDCM, FRCPC, MM
Division Director, Rheumatology,
McGill University Health Centre
Assistant Dean, PGME, CBME
Associate Professor of Medicine,
Division of Rheumatology,
McGill University*