

Medical Personnel can Influence Climate Change by Affecting Eating Habits

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To the Editor

Deeper reflection on today's greatest ills surprisingly leads to the conclusion that medical staff can have a significant impact on the real mitigation of climate change and the catastrophic emissions of greenhouse gases. We will believe it, if we recall that the main sources of the colossal increase in CO₂ emissions are not only (a) transport, (b) industry and construction, but also (c) agriculture and food production.

It is known that eating habits have changed in many countries in recent decades. Increasing amounts of meat are consumed. The breeding of slaughter animals is increasing, which causes a significant increase in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions [1,2]. It was calculated that if slaughter animal husbandry was reduced by half, which would obviously result from a reduction in meat demand, greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by about a quarter [3,4].

A reduction in meat consumption could occur due to the spread of a vegetarian or semi-vegetarian nutritional pattern. Reducing the consumption of meat dishes by half would not cause any damage to health. It would only be a change in the widespread behavioral pattern.

It is the responsibility of medical professions to express professional and substantive opinions on eating habits. The citizens of a country are probably more likely to consider a message about a nutritional pattern, if it is spoken by a person competent in the field of nutrition. Therefore, it seems to us that dietitians, nurses and doctors are predisposed to give opinions on nutrition.

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The disastrous situation of the climate requires action. Our argument leads to the conclusion that it just so happens that in terms of one of the main sources of greenhouse gas emissions, taking effective action is possible and depends largely on the attitude of medical professionals.

This prompted us to formulate this appeal to health professionals to think about how to convince and disseminate the fashion of a vegetarian diet or a diet with a significant reduction in meat consumption. It would be crucial to formulate a convincing argument that combines the usual well-known arguments of vegetarian dieters with pro-social and pro-ecological arguments, referring to the need to counteract climate change. It would be necessary to create a fashion of such an ecological, nutritional behavioral pattern.

In the next step, it would be necessary to think about how to combine the influence of medical professionals and mass media [5]. Since the possibility of reducing greenhouse gas emissions discussed here would result from a change in people's behavior, the original source and main driver of the action should come from representatives of medical professions, and then stimulate appropriate mass media or even governments and legislation. We believe that such an action could be initiated by the editors of a prestigious, high circulation medical journal.

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