

World Health Organization Day 2022 “Our Planet, Our Health”

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The clarion call to observe World Health Day every year is a great initiative propelled by World Health Organization (WHO) and certainly is primarily aimed at creating immaculate awareness about holistic health and global well-being.¹ The first ever World Health Day was observed on the 7 April 1950. Ever since then, World Health Day is observed annually on 7 April which incidentally signifies the anniversary of the founding of WHO in the year 1948.² The theme for World Health Day 2022 has been planned that center around “Our Planet, Our Health.”³

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT: THE GLOBAL CONCERN

The air that we breathe has become toxic. Most of us inhale unhealthy air that is largely attributed to the reckless burning of fossil fuels. Strangely enough and that despite the all-round progress visualized by the modern world, vector-borne diseases are flourishing. Global warming has taken a heavy toll.⁴ To add to our misery, degradation of land and scarcity of water resources are happening unabated that certainly have afflicted general health. Our health has presently taken the back seat, despite the resources that we spend on the establishment and sustenance of the health care delivery system.⁵ Consumption of junk food sans nutritive value has become the order of the day. Metabolic syndrome has become the forerunner of diabetes mellitus. Cancer and cardiovascular diseases have evolved as notoriously threatening non-communicable diseases.⁶ Now, time has arrived for embarking on nodal and effective strategies to promote global health.

LESSONS LEARNT FROM CORONAVIRUS DISEASE-2019 (COVID-19)

The dreadful COVID-19 pandemic has cast lasting and threatening consequences on global citizens. Besides health, the pandemic has uprooted the very tenets of society, devastated the livelihood of communities and ravaged the economy. The lessons learnt from the pandemic point to immediate and pronounced implications for effectively and aggressively addressing the climate crisis.⁷ The global community needs also to garner resources for not only enabling a rapid recoup from COVID-19 but also focusing attention on population health, economic viability, resource regeneration and most significantly, climate action.

PLANETARY HEALTH: A NOVEL APPROACH TO HOLISTIC HEALTH

The novel concept of “Planetary Health” came into existence in the year 2015, thanks to the efforts of Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet

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Commission.⁸ Soon, it paved the way for the Helsinki Conference that essentially centered around the theme “Safeguarding Our Planet, Safeguarding Our Health”. The conference mainly underlined the need for marshalling scientific evidences to depict the fact that it is the human being and more importantly, human activities that cause climate change, altered biodiversity, depletion of natural resources, and pollution. The conference recommended robust and time-bound multidisciplinary and multi-sectorial endeavors. The conference also highlighted the fact that it is through systematic actions that we could be in a vantage position to protect human health, thereby enhancing the quality of planetary health itself. “Planetary Health” is synonymous with a paradigm shift and indeed a shift for the good. The health of the global civilization should take the lead in promoting comprehensive policies that would eventually foster health for all on this planet.⁹

NEED TO ENHANCE OUR FOCUS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

It has been uniformly agreed by policymakers across the globe that eight key areas continue to hamper our health and the planet. They are chemical safety, air pollution, climate change and natural calamities, and microbial diseases, lack of equity in access to health care, infrastructure-related considerations, inferior water quality and shrinking water resources, and lastly, global environmental issues.¹⁰ A significant facet is that all of these are linked to the environment in which we live. We need to take cognizance of the cardinal factor, namely, the upkeep of a healthy environment. Nearly one-fourth of the mortality observed in children below 5 years of age is largely preventable, because it is intrinsically linked to environmental health problems. Environmental health advocacy is presently regarded as a top priority in the scenario of public health.¹¹ Factors causing climate change is a dreaded phenomenon that might culminate in altered disease patterns, besides increasing the susceptibility to a plethora of illnesses.

In the recent years, sub-optimal industrial hygiene has paved way for gross disturbances in environmental factors. Public health professionals are frontline professionals who are endowed with the huge responsibility of apprising the public about the environmental factors that markedly govern personal health, community well-being, and even quality of life in world countries.¹² To optimize the results of our endeavor, we need to certainly rationalize educational outreach and advocacy.

OUR PLANET, OUR HEALTH: ROLE OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS

Nurses constitute nearly 60% of health professionals worldwide. They have a huge role to play with reference to planetary health because of their collective potentials and actions. Nursing professionals reflect the first health provider and moreover, they are in close proximity to the patient community whom they serve.¹³ The nursing personnel are naturally bestowed with immense potentials to spread awareness about the climate change and environmental upheaval, since their voices are heard by the patient community. An additional point that is noteworthy to mention is that the nurses are naturally in close contact with the patient community who are most vulnerable to climate change. Documentary evidences point to the fact that augmented nurse staffing has been associated with reduced mortality rate, especially with reference to the morbidity that would arise from climate sensitive vector-borne diseases including malaria, dengue, etc.¹⁴

FUTURE ROLE OF NURSING PROFESSIONALS IN PLANETARY HEALTH

Nurses are poised to don the role of effective torch bearers of important facts linked to climate change and impact on health. The public in general and patient community, in particular are quite adept at creating an instantaneous rapport with the nurses that allows the nursing personnel to dwell on creating environmental awareness with a deeper insight. Nurses have a moral responsibility to deliberate and pronounce the rights of future generations, vulnerable groups, and the indignant patient community who suffer from the fear that justice is not conferred on them. With the concept of global health picking up fast, nursing professionals have to work in unison with experts in public health, internal medicine, and the behavioral health fraternity so as to confront challenges and address them amicably and effectively as well.¹⁵

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