

PREFACE

A Climate and Health Groundswell

This issue of the *Annals of Global Health* highlights the significant nexus of climate change, global health, and human rights. Mount Sinai, with its rich history of social concern and inclusionary practice, has stood at the forefront of advancing research and policies that promote social justice and health equity. As we look ahead to the coming years, we are acutely aware that the effects of climate change will unduly burden the poor.

Dr. Holly Atkinson, director of the Human Rights Program at Mount Sinai, has been instrumental in supporting our commitment to leverage the medical community's significant role in climate-change mitigation and development of adaptation strategies. Her tremendous dedication in editing this special issue dovetails with a number of recent climate and health events that portend a new era of dialogue and action on this critical issue, which we at Mount Sinai have engaged and helped convene.

First, the 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change released its report "Health and Climate Change: Policy Responses to Protect Public Health."¹ This report advances the work of the landmark 2009 Lancet Commission report, "Managing the Health Effects of Climate Change,"² and repositions climate change from the "the biggest global health threat" to the "greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century." Our institution—the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai—hosted the US release of this report in July. The event, including a panel on which Dr. Sheffield was honored to present, was well attended both in person and via live stream on the Internet. The video link was posted on the White House blog, reaching an initial audience of more than 600 people (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/06/18/public-health-climate-summit>).

Second, Pope Francis made headlines in May with the release of his papal encyclical focusing on environmental stewardship.³ In response, Philip Landrigan, a global leader in children's environmental health and the Mount Sinai Dean for Global Health said, "As an institution that has been at the forefront of research and advocacy in environmental health for more than 50 years, the Icahn School of Medicine

at Mount Sinai salutes the Holy Father, Pope Francis on his brilliant and visionary encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, calling for a 'new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet' and urging all people to protect the earth's environment; to end the destructive behaviors that lead to global warming, species extinction, and pollution of air, soil and water; and to take active steps to restore our earth."

Third, our institution, under the leadership of Dean Dennis Charney and Dean of Medical Education David Muller, along with deans from other prominent US medical, nursing, and public health schools, has committed to educating tomorrow's physicians and public health leaders about climate change. In support of these commitments, 2 events recently occurred in Washington, DC: the White House hosted a summit on Public Health and Climate Change, and the Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University convened a planning meeting to strategize ways to integrate climate change and health into health professional curricula.

From our perspective, this groundswell of activity—no doubt in part motivated by the approaching United Nations Conference on Climate Change scheduled to occur in Paris this fall—has the potential to help build the needed partnerships for large-scale action. Here at home, the doors to our new Arnhold Institute for Global Health at Mount Sinai opened this year. The inaugural director, renowned global health expert Prabhjot Singh, was previously director of systems design at the Earth Institute at Columbia University, where landmark work has been done to bring the issue of climate change to the forefront and address the underlying causes of vulnerability. We look forward to the innovative research Dr. Singh will shepherd and the powerful effect it will have on helping underserved communities.

To quote Pope Francis, "[a] sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society."

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