

Naturopathic Notes: Planetary Health Edition — A time for action

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The concept of planetary health as the health and sustainability of Earth's natural systems is the subject of increased scientific enquiry and interest across many different disciplines. Multiple voices are now proposing that the health and vitality of individuals and their social, political, and natural environments are linked in a fundamental way.

As a former editor in chief of the UK *Lancet* medical journal writes, planetary health should include not only the narrower purview of environmental health but should be considered instead “an inquiry into our total world.”¹

As naturopathic doctors, many of us would certainly think of our own environmental medicine movement (spearheaded by Walter Crinnion, whose life we celebrate in this issue) as part of this interconnected study of planetary health as ecologic and holistic medicine, as well as clinical ecology.² Increasingly, discussion of climate change also plays a role in this consideration, as external ecological systems such as lengthening allergy seasons, novel vector-borne infectious disease, and increasingly severe heat and weather patterns impact the prevalence of many of the conditions that appear in our offices.

The articles in this edition challenge us to get back to the roots of our profession, as a movement to incorporate environment and nature in the health of individuals. The authors encourage us to think about how we translate the emerging science on planetary health into effective clinical communication, and how we can advocate as doctors and citizens, for better environmental policy.

We lead off this time with a guest editorial by Daria Love announcing the formation of a new ND-led organization called Naturopathic Doctors for Environmental and Social Trust (NEST), whose mandate is to harness the capacity of naturopathic doctors to improve environmental and social-justice circumstances in the communities we serve. In a similar vein, our Executive Director Shawn O'Reilly writes about the upcoming Canadian federal election and ND-government relations, urging members to engage with our local political candidates, and to communicate the value of naturopathic care to those who will form the next government.

It is fitting then, in an edition on planetary health, that we have tributes from two prominent naturopathic environmental medicine

colleagues on the life and work of the late Walter Crinnion. Chris Spooner and Lyn Patrick have both written moving accolades to Walter as pioneering researcher and advocate, mentor, co-author, inspiration and friend, as he was to many of us.

Next, we have two authors who will illustrate how to translate the loftier goals of planetary health to actionable naturopathic clinical practice. Leslie Solomonian proposes consideration of an ecological hierarchy of therapeutics and argues passionately for a moral obligation of naturopathic clinicians for climate action. Sonya Nobbie discusses a systems biology approach to clinical communication, making a link between climate and environmental change and effective health promotion strategies. “Humans” she writes, “are more than stewards of our environment – we're manifestations and extensions of it”.

Nicole Redvers then takes a more global approach in her article, arguing that NDs, with our holistic mindset, are primed to help advocate for an Indigenous-led discourse on environmental stewardship. Such discourse, she demonstrates, has been lacking from the scientifically siloed planetary health movement, where Indigenous voices worldwide have been systematically excluded.

Our concluding article, from Vicki Simkovic and Dave Nelson, argues from a biological viewpoint for a link between loss of biodiversity in the natural world and the increasing prevalence of human inflammatory diseases. They also define a thematic link between ecological grief, and the enlarging prevalence of post-traumatic stress and anxiety disorders worldwide.

Finally, and on a more personal note, I would like to give a heartfelt thank-you to David Lescheid, who will be leaving us after 14 years of distinguished service as a reviewer and editorial board member of this journal. As a reviewer, he has demonstrated a seemingly uncanny knack for incorporating objectivity, humility, and helpful constructive criticism to articles as they wound their way through the often-challenging review process. Similarly, on our editorial board, he very often had both insightful and helpful contributions about upcoming editorial themes and issues. If you've written for us at any time over the past 14 years, and have received thought-provoking, incisive guidance delivered in an unbiased way, you just might know David a bit better than you think.

As always, my email inbox is open to letters, feedback and suggestions. 🍂

References

1. Horton R. Offline: Planetary health-worth everything. *Lancet*. 2018, 386, 1973-2028.
2. Nelson D, Prescott SL, Logan AC, Bland JS. Clinical Ecology—Transforming 21st-Century Medicine with Planetary Health in Mind. *Challenges*. 2019, 10, 15.