

Medical Education Curricula in Pakistan Must Address the Consequences of Climate Change on the Health of the People and their Solution

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has documented that "climate change has been intensifying public health problems and described climate change as one of the leading human health threats¹. In reality, climate change is now a public health emergency, as evident from the increased incidence of wildfires, extremes of heat waves, increased floods, and shifting patterns of infectious disease².

The threat of climate change substantially impacts the practice of healthcare practitioners. Hence, clinicians must acknowledge, recognize and comprehend "how climate change affects the health of human beings". The patients can directly or indirectly suffer from the impacts of climate change^{3,4}. The health-related implications of climate change are heat-related conditions/diseases, food and water-related illnesses, increased transmission of infection, and trauma and distress of dislocation of people in extreme weather episodes^{4,5}.

For effective and quality care of the patients in the coming days, clinicians must be educated to take care of the patients affected by climate change. Henceforth, clinicians' role is crucial in mitigating health crises. They advise people on how to protect themselves from the effects of climate change and diagnose and manage the patients impacted by climate change^{3,4}. Various organizations globally have widely acknowledged the need to train healthcare providers, including clinicians, nurses, public health professionals, and others, in the health-related impacts of climate change⁴.

Acknowledging the realities of climate change and its impact on human health, medical schools worldwide, especially in developed countries such as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, and Ireland, have started adding climate change to their medical school curricula^{3,5}. By 2022, more than 65% of medical schools in the USA included climate change and its impact on human health in their curricula; Harvard Medical School was

the first to take the lead⁵. Medical schools worldwide, especially in developed countries, have started to bring innovations in climate change curricula. Most of these innovations are primarily driven by the medical students³.

It is essential that healthcare professionals know and understand the effects of climate change on human health and are trained to take care of the health of the people affected by it in Pakistan. Pakistan Medical Dental Council Guidelines for Undergraduate Medical Education (MBBS) Curriculum 2024 in Community Medicine course under the heading of Environmental Health Sciences has just mentioned Climate: Climate and Weather⁶ but does not address the consequence of climate change on people's health and its coping and managing strategy. The curricula of different specialities of medicine might not contain health-related impacts of climate change and how to deal with these.

Here, we take the example of Stanford University School of Medicine (SUSM) Curricula. SUSM has integrated the impacts of climate change on health into more than a dozen courses of their curricula, from preclinical to clinical and residency curricula, including clerkship training. They have also used a longitudinal approach to climate change and health education².

As Pakistan is facing the profound impact of climate change with changing weather patterns, medical practitioners and clinicians of every speciality must be trained to deal with the health-related effects of climate change. The medical, allied sciences and specialty curricula must include climate change, its impact on human health and coping and managing strategies for its effects on people's health, so incoming healthcare providers must be prepared to face the health-related challenges of climate change.

Lastly, we quote Gaurab Basu, a primary care physician at Cambridge Health Alliance, a safety net healthcare system affiliated with Harvard Medical School, "Learning about climate change in medical school shouldn't be an afterthought; it's fundamental to the practice of being a good doctor. If we make it standard to understand how diseases are changing because of climate change, we'll be better prepared to diagnose our patients and provide appropriate treatment plans."

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