



A Guide for Engagement and Advocacy

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With increasing urgency, we are seeing (and feeling) how health can be threatened by the changing environment. As the climate transformation becomes more pervasive and its dangers more evident, many of us feel compelled to act. However, figuring out how and where to start can be daunting. In this Guide, we hope to share basic tips on how to advocate effectively, in a way that works for you, so that you can help make a meaningful impact in the wake of increasingly severe climate threats.

The field of medicine has an important obligation to not only treat illnesses, but to expand and advocate for community health. This is only possible thanks to the communities of other students, trainees, and clinicians that we can learn from and share ideas with, and most effective when we are active, engaged members of our local communities. We believe that, by taking steps to work with local advocacy groups, understand their needs and methods, and contribute however is best for you, trust and communication can be built that makes both our and their jobs easier.

We understand the need to treat a child with heat stroke emergently, or to prevent a senior on a beta blocker from going for an afternoon walk in high temperatures. But what can we do on a larger scale, and how can we prevent further injury to our environment? Ensuring access to air conditioning and supporting cooling centers for those who need it is similar to using cardiac stents and bypass surgery for a patient with established coronary artery disease. It's important to combat the **root causes** of climate change to halt the progression of damage to the environment, not just react to its effects after they've become overtly harmful. As students or clinicians or community advocates, we can – and must – tackle the growing threat of climate change at all levels. This Guide will help us find ways to engage in mitigating risks and to help lessen the current course of climate harm, facilitating change from an individual level all the way to policies that impact the planet. The language of health is universal and can serve as a common and powerful driving force towards the goal of taking care of the environment.

This Guide for Engagement and Advocacy will empower you to act and to advocate. Within this Guide are recommendations and resources you can use to engage on a local and a larger scale. There are some that are directly related to preventing heat related illness, and some that will help you advocate for changes in policy. The impacts of advocacy are not always uniform, and the impact of your involvement, as well as your role in community advocacy, will depend on your personal preferences and circumstances, in addition to your location and relevant communities and policy-makers.

How can we start? Here are some key questions that might help you plan your endeavors:

QUESTIONS TO GET STARTED*

1. Identify the problem (*what*)
2. Understand the historical and scientific underpinnings (*why*)
3. Who does it affect? (*who is harmed*)
4. Who is at fault? (*who inflicts harm*)
5. Are there groups already working on solutions? (*who is helping*)
 - a. What do they have already? What do they need?
 - b. What tactics have proven useful?
 - c. How can you enhance their efforts? Your contribution?
6. Who can reasonably fix it? (*who has power to change situation*)
7. What would it take to get them to tackle this? (*how*)
8. What is your preferred method of persuasion? (*how*)
9. What are your spheres of influence? (*where*)

*Questions by Andrew Horwitz

CLINICAL

The first Arizona Climate & Health learning module discusses how to recognize the symptoms of heat related illness, and how to treat the individual. The second module reviews what is happening from the public health vantage, and possible ways to minimize risks for the most vulnerable. We know the effects of unrelenting and dangerously high temperatures on a person and the toll on communities at a local and a global scale. The projections for the future of our region—as well as for much of the rest of the world—are alarming. What role can we play to help protect patients and the environments that we all live in? In what ways are you, as a clinician, more equipped than others to advocate for change?

As you progress in your medical training and continue to mature in your clinical experience, you have probably realized that one of the most important parts of your job is the role of educating your patients on what they can do to avoid or minimize illness and embrace healthy choices. Whether it is convincing a patient to take their medication, or helping someone understand when the benefit of having a necessary surgery outweighs the risks involved in the procedure, you are engaging in a

conversation with your patient and together crafting a plan that is sometimes difficult, but always necessary.

As clinicians, it's our duty to learn the scientific and medical background so that we can engage in discussions with our patients with an understanding of the risks and benefits for different treatments. However, without knowing the patient's circumstances, our attempts to influence behaviors will often be hindered.

When you are trying to convince a patient to stop smoking, to take a statin, or to undergo abdominal surgery, you need to help the patient understand why these actions are in his best interest. To do that, you need to have some understanding of the patient's spoken and unspoken preferences. Once you are able to suit the medical science to the patient's own situation, it is easier to know how best to help.

As clinicians, the ability to learn and to communicate complex concepts to patients with no clinical background is part of our daily experience. Just as we advise minimizing risks from tobacco products, opioids, or excess unprotected time in the sun, we now also need to advise that our patients avoid risks of environmental exposures. Many of our patients (and millions of others) are at risk for heat related illness, including severe heat stroke or death. A large number may not have reliable air conditioning or power. Some depend on jobs that require strenuous labor in too-hot and too-humid conditions. Although we can educate about the risks, and they can understand the potential harm to their health, not everyone is able to avoid dangerous environments/conditions. We need to depend on community and policy to help advocate for and protect patients that may not be able to change their circumstances.

COMMUNITY

Our patients impact their families, communities, workplaces, and public officials. Therefore, educating them on the risks of continuing injury to the climate can have an effect beyond the level of the patient. However, for this to have any significant impact beyond an individual, it is imperative for the patient to fully understand the risk to the health of the community and loved ones. Health is a powerful motivator, and helping teach our patients about the reasons we are concerned and how they can help is a crucial role we can play as clinicians.

We can also directly educate those in our community. With our medical education and commitment to health, we have some credibility as we explain how the actions of the community can impact health. This trust needs to be returned with a reliance on unbiased interpretation of data, and with honest assessments of what that information means for community members. Consider speaking at an appropriate local gathering, or

guest-teaching at a school. Develop a curriculum or method of education that can inform and persuade on a clear, factual basis.

Joining an established group can help you start, and can have the most impact. You can share knowledge and divide tasks according to strengths and interests.

Advocating for the first time can be uncomfortable, but with how vital this work is, volunteering in any capacity can make an impact. This apprehension can also be lessened by choosing a method of engagement that you feel most comfortable with.

POLICY

As a student, trainee, or practicing clinician, your views can be helpful to those in policy-making roles. Helping craft summaries for legislators is a tactic used by professional lobbyists and large contributors. While opposing organizations may have more access to funding and communications, elected officials may take heed of medical professionals with direct experience dealing with environmental health risks and a significant role to a community. If you can, make an appointment to meet with the legislative assistant for health (or whatever area you are advocating about) 1:1 and come prepared with evidence to support solid advice. A cost/benefit discussion, or a suggestion of how the lawmaker might stand to benefit in the voters' eyes could be a strong argument in favor of your ask. Other tactics include emails and phone calls to politicians' local and capitol offices.

MEDIA

Media attention can have a significant impact. Plan your approach wisely. Be sure to base your statements on solid grounding, and know what your goals are. Try to use your platform and credibility to help inform, educate, and inspire action. Write editorials for print and digital publication. Raise awareness through an appearance on a radio show, podcast, or video program. Contribute to a documentary and spread word. The options are numerous, and you can choose your method of involvement based on your own skills, interests, knowledge and accessible venues to best suit your own preferences and community.

If you feel comfortable using social media, explore the possibilities in those venues. The demographics (and thus, the audiences) differ, and your way of messaging might need to alter accordingly. Consider joining established groups to help collaborate and organize.

ACTION AT A PERSONAL LEVEL

While personal changes may never have as dramatic an impact as those on a legislative or corporate scale, nor is it a feasible replacement for that kind of action, it may still be motivational to lessen your carbon footprint at an individual level. Additionally, more environmentally-friendly nutrition choices are often healthier choices as well. Avoiding processed foods, limiting meat consumption to small portions from grass-fed and organic animals can serve dual purposes. Preferentially selecting in-season and local produce will limit use of fossil fuels, while making healthier habits easier to sustain.

The viability of making these choices— while busy studying, working, practicing, and everything else in life— depends on if they are possible with the financial, dietary, and personal restrictions that many face. Self-forgiveness, a built-in degree of tolerance for knowing that there will be times that you cannot be perfect, is vital in enacting any major change in life. Embrace the changes you have been able to make and the successes along the way. Acknowledge that life is complex and challenging, but that you are doing what you can do with an eye on the long-term and overarching outcomes. It's much more important to trend in the right direction over a long time than to insist on growth every day.