

INTEGRATING PLANETARY HEALTH INTO MEDICAL EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change is recognized as "the greatest threat to global health in the 21st century" (WHO, 2015) and disproportionately affects Indigenous populations (Berry & Schnitter, 2022). However, planetary health, which connects human health to the condition of natural systems (Horton & Lo, 2015), is underrepresented in medical training (Bouka et al., 2021). Addressing this gap requires integrating planetary health into medical education, with a focus on climate change, Indigenous perspectives, and the role of physician advocacy.

PURPOSE

Curriculum Development: Educate and empower physicians to understand the connection between human and planetary health.
Advocacy Empowerment: Frame climate change as a medical and ethical issue, emphasizing the need to address oppressive systems like colonization that drive environmental harm, and highlight the value of Indigenous knowledge systems.

BACKGROUND

Four key interconnected areas formed foundation of curriculum.

KEY COMPONENTS

Health Impacts: Climate change intensifies health risks

Colonization: Historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism compound climate-related health inequities.

Braiding Knowledge: Equal value to diverse knowledge systems

Advocacy: Physician are required to protect health equity and mitigate illness

COLLABORATION

In partnership with the Indigenous Family Medicine Residency Program, a planetary health curriculum grounded in Indigenous worldviews was developed, featuring audio mini-lectures.

CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

Unit 1: Climate Literacy

Examines the impacts of climate change, the connections between systemic oppression, colonization, and environmental health, climate science fundamentals and integration of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems.

Unit 2: Direct Health Impacts

Links climate events to health outcomes, and the necessity of incorporating this knowledge into medical practice.

Unit 3: Physician Action

Practical strategies for addressing climate change at the patient, community, and systemic levels

LISTEN:
MINI-
LECTURES

Listen to Audio mini-lectures

PROJECT FINDINGS

Group interviews were conducted before curriculum development and after implementation to assess resident physicians' knowledge, identify gaps, and gather feedback. Key themes emerged from these discussions.

THEMES PRIOR TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

- Employ **case-based learning** to clarify physicians' roles in planetary health
- **Connect colonialism** directly to climate change
- Provide fundamental **climate science** knowledge
- Incorporate room for **reflection**

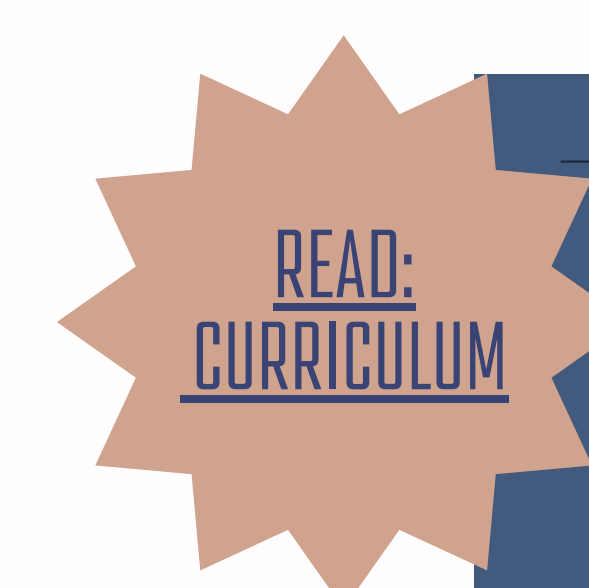
THEMES AFTER CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

- **Planetary Health Conceptualization:** Through Indigenous perspectives
- **Gaps in Medical Education:** Desire for earlier climate education in training
- **Intersectionality:** Recognition of diverse, underrepresented perspectives
- **Action and Advocacy:** Appreciation for actionable steps for physicians
- **Diverse Learning Formats:** Positive response to audio format, land-based learning
- **Self-Care and Boundaries:** Work-life balance, reflection, and dedicated time

CONCLUSION

This initiative integrates planetary health education into residency programs, equipping future physicians with essential knowledge and advocacy skills to address pressing health challenges. Aligned with calls for systemic change, it emphasizes collaboration across knowledge systems and offers a model adaptable to various medical programs.

Going forward, expanding participation can embed planetary health into foundational medical education, fostering its inclusion as a core component of healthcare training.



Read Planetary Health in Medicine Full Curriculum



Watch full presentation - Internship Climate Action Project

REFERENCES

Berry, P., & Schnitter, R. (2022). Health of Canadians in a changing climate: Advancing our knowledge for action. <https://doi.org/10.4095/329522>
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Horton, R., & Lo, S. (2015). Planetary health: A new science for exceptional action. The Lancet, 386(10007), 1921–1922. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(15\)61038-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)61038-8)
WHO. (2015). WHO calls for urgent action to protect health from climate change – Sign the call. <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/2015/09/20150915-who-calls-for-urgent-action-to-protect-health-from-climate-change>