

Improving planetary health through Primary Health Care: Possibilities for implementation

Aprimorando a saúde planetária através da Atenção Primária à Saúde: Possibilidades de implementação

Mejorando la salud planetaria a través de la Atención Primaria de Salud: posibilidades de implementación

Iel Marciano de Moraes Filho¹, Giovana Galvão Tavares²

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1. Paulista University, Brasília Campus, Brasília, Distrito federal, Brazil.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0798-3949>

2. Evangelical University of Goiás, Anápolis, Goiás, Brazil.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5959-2897>

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Planetary health is a global movement that aims to develop evidence-based solutions to minimize the environmental problems caused by climate change. It is dedicated to the study of the interdependencies between the health of the planet's natural systems and the health of human civilization, touching in an interdisciplinary way, with the purpose of understanding the impacts of human activity on the environment and on individual and collective health, and to recognize that human health is closely linked to the health of the planet, and that environmental degradation can lead to disease and health problems on a large scale.^{1,2}

The World Organization of Family Physicians (WONCA)³ statement on planetary health and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlights the importance of scientific evidence to understand the impacts of environmental pollution and climate change on human health.^{3,4} This declaration recognizes that environmental degradation can lead to large-scale disease and health problems.³

WONCA listed scientific evidence of the impacts of pollution and climate change on human health. Thus, air pollution is the leading cause of death and disability worldwide, as estimated by Floss and Barros (2019), in 2015, 52,000 people died in Brazil due to air pollution.⁴

The evidences mentioned have led groups of researchers to produce protocols^{1,5,6} and didactic material² to encourage the discussion of the theme in Primary Health Care (PHC), since problems such as heat stress, non-contagious acute infectious diseases (Dengue and Chikungunya) and infectious diseases (Zika) caused by the hosts "Aedes aegypti and Aedes albopictus" that have their vector capacity increased due to climate change⁷; pulmonary and respiratory diseases (asthma, sinusitis) and cardiovascular events (motivated by extreme temperatures leading to increased deaths from cardiovascular diseases, as well as increased mortality from acute myocardial infarction in winter)^{8,9} among others, they can be examples of problems caused due to climate change and air pollution and are recurrent in the population and, of course, in users of the Basic Health Units (BHU) operated by teams of the Family Health Strategy (FHS).^{10,11}

This dynamic is regulated by the National Policy of Primary Care (PNAB)¹¹ which is configured as a care strategy that seeks to offer quality, accessible and equitable health services for all, with a focus on disease prevention and health promotion. Therefore, it is considered the basis of the public health system in Brazil and is fundamental to ensure that people can have access to the necessary care, regardless of their socioeconomic status.¹² It is configured in a multiprofessional way, within territories of coverage, involving intersectoral actions.¹

Thus, some actions can be adopted by the health team in PHC to promote planetary health and, of course, human health:

- Promote education and awareness of health professionals, patients and the community in general about the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on health. This can be done through information campaigns to, for example, reduce waste on the streets or vacant lots and to minimize the proliferation of vectors of Dengue, Zika and Chikungunya.
- Encourage sustainable practices in UBS's, such as the efficient use of resources, waste reduction, recycling and energy conservation. This contributes to the reduction of environmental impact and can inspire people to make people aware of the importance of sustainability and encourage them to adopt similar practices in their daily lives.
- Prioritize the prevention and control of diseases that are directly related to climate change and environmental degradation, such as respiratory diseases, vector-borne diseases (such as dengue and malaria), and diseases related to exposure to environmental pollutants.
- Promote an interdisciplinary approach in PHC, involving professionals from different areas, such as health, environment and urban planning. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of planetary health challenges and facilitates the implementation of integrated health promotion strategies.
- Perform continuous monitoring of health indicators related to the environment and planetary health, as well as support research in this area. This helps in identifying trends, developing effective interventions and assessing the impact of the actions taken.
- Encourage the use and promotion of healthy living and socializing spaces such as parks and leisure areas, facilitating social interaction and emotional well-being. By promoting healthy living and socializing spaces, we are encouraging a more sustainable and environmentally conscious lifestyle. Soon parks and recreation areas help preserve natural ecosystems by providing habitats for diverse species of plants and animals. In addition, these green areas help improve air quality by filtering pollutants and providing oxygen.

These are just a few possible actions in PHC to promote planetary health. It is important to highlight that the interdisciplinary approach, awareness raising and integration with other sectors are fundamental to face the complex challenges related to human health and the environment.

Health professionals working in PHC have a fundamental role as social influencers due to the trust that the population places in them. They can take advantage of this position to make recommendations and promote planetary health, which directly impacts the health of society and contributes to a healthier and more sustainable future for all.^{4,13,14}

It is essential that health professionals in PHC improve their professional practices, going beyond technical capacity. They must develop ethical and humanistic aspects, allowing the identification, dialogue and preparation of populations at risk and vulnerability for local events that cause collective disorders.^{14,15}

In this sense, planetary health becomes an essential field and should be integrated into PHC, providing reflections and actions that promote quality of life individually and collectively. These reflections and actions can address from the importance of environmental conservation to the implementation of strategies for the prevention and control of diseases related to the environment.^{13,14}

Thus, health professionals in PHC play a crucial role in promoting planetary health, training and guiding the population on the impacts of human activity on the environment and health, contributing to the adoption of healthy and sustainable behaviors and promoting the resilience of communities in the face of global challenges.

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Correspondent Author

Iel Marciano de Moraes Filho
Paulista University, Department of Nursing,
Block 913, Block B - South Wing. ZIP: 70390-130.
Brasília, Distrito Federal, Brazil.
ielfilho@yahoo.com.br