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fgodlee@bmj.com Follow Fiona on
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A world on the edge of climate disaster

Fiona Godlee *editor in chief*

The world is heating up and so is the urgency for action. Without radical change in the way we live, move, eat, work, and play, rising global temperatures will result in irreversible planetary change, with catastrophic consequences for humanity. These are strong words but they are backed by science. The International Panel on Climate Change says that, to keep the post-industrial global temperature rise below the tipping point of 1.5°C, the world must halve its emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050. At current rates of emissions we in the UK will use up our individual carbon budgets in less than four years (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2391).¹

But who is it that must change? Must we wait for our governments to enact the necessary radical reforms? In which case, despite the rhetoric and the impending gathering of world leaders in Glasgow next month, we will almost certainly be disappointed (<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/10/07/cop26-a-missed-opportunity-for-climate-leadership>),² and this precious chance to avert human and natural disaster will be lost (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2329).³

Government action is essential, as this week's special issue of *The BMJ* on the climate emergency makes clear. But our editorial also calls on us all to act as individuals in our different spheres of influence (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2425)⁴: as family members, citizens, and respected members of our communities; as diagnosticians, prescribers, and managers of healthcare resources (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2407)⁵; as educators, trainers, and curriculum leaders (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2385)⁶; as designers of healthcare systems (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2408)⁷; as public health professionals with an understanding of the wider determinants of health; and as members of any organisation, since membership allows, indeed requires, us to hold those in authority to account. The responsibility to act is especially strong on us as health professionals, given our remit to promote and protect health and our trusted and privileged position in society.

Hope is essential, to ward off eco-anxiety (<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/10/06/the-climate-crisis-and-the-rise-of-eco-anxiety>)⁸ and to spur ourselves and others on to effective action. Healthcare can bring down its carbon footprint, and in the UK is doing so (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2337).⁹ Structural changes to our physical and economic environments have the potential to drive behaviour change and substantially cut emissions (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2293).¹⁰ And the right economic decisions could lead us into a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient global future (doi:10.1136/bmj.n2405).¹¹

Collectively and individually we must lead by example: driving system change in healthcare to reduce emissions and waste, advocating for national

and international political action, and educating our patients and the public (<https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/10/07/talking-to-patients-about-the-climate-emergency>)¹² to help safeguard the future of our planet and its people. We can't wait for someone else to act. We don't have time for that.

See more of *The BMJ's* articles on the climate emergency at
<https://www.bmj.com/campaign/climate-emergency>.

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