

Fossil fuels, air pollution, and climate change

[Identification:]

My name is Susie Cue ; I'm a pediatrician in Richmond California.

[Problem:]

Many of my patients live in a very polluted neighborhood near two freeways and an oil refinery, It seems like more and more of the children I see have asthma, Last week I had a patient - I'll call him Alex - who had six asthma attacks just in the last month. I know that the higher levels of ozone pollution and extreme heat we're seeing due to climate change are making his asthma attacks even worse. It's gotten so bad that Alex is missing school and starting to fall behind. I'm worried that his asthma is interfering with his education.

[Solution:]

That's why I'm working with other pediatricians to push for stronger regulations of the refinery and diesel truck emissions that are making my patients sick every day.

[Value:]

it's not fair that so many kids like Alex are suffering from worse asthma when we have the technology and know-how to clean up the air and reduce climate pollution. Every child should be able to breathe clean air, and every child should be protected from the impacts of catastrophic climate change. We really need to act now.

That's why it's so important to me that our leaders are committed to taking actions that protect our climate and our health.

Fracking

[Identification:]

My name is Peter Pan, and I'm a pediatrician in western Pennsylvania - I just retired after 40 years in practice in this community, and I care deeply about this place and the people who live here. I also represent the Pennsylvania chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

[Problem:]

This used to be a really rural community. Now we have hundreds of fracking wells to produce natural gas. At first there was enthusiasm about decent paying new jobs. Now I'm concerned about the hundreds of toxic chemicals used in fracking. In all my years of practice, I can remember only one boy with osteosarcoma - a rare bone cancer - until the last two years, when suddenly we've had nearly a dozen cases. Honestly, as a pediatrician, it's heartbreaking. These kids are losing limbs, they're missing out on their sports, on their childhood. We cannot say for sure that these cancers were directly caused by fracking, but we can say for sure that fossil fuel pollution is increasing because of climate change and is directly responsible for harming the health of our children now and in the future.

[Value:]

I think we would all agree we should be protecting the health of our children, not hurting them.

[Solution:]

As a pediatrician, a long-time resident of Pennsylvania and a grandfather, I want our leaders to invest in clean and safe renewable energy - there's plenty of good jobs in that, and it doesn't put our children's health or our climate at risk. That's why I support leaders who care about our health and about our climate, and who will work hard to take action to protect both.

Energy poverty and heat and health

[Identification:]

My name is Marisela Mira, and I'm a family practitioner in the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas.

[Problem:]

Texas has always been hot in the summers, but climate change is making it hotter and hotter, for longer every year. And we don't get the cooler nights anymore that are really important to give people some relief from the heat. Last week, one of my patients - Mrs. Ramirez - asked if I could do anything to help, because she doesn't have enough money to fix her broken air conditioner. She lives alone on the top floor of an older building in a neighborhood that has almost no trees or shade, she's 78 years old. I'm really worried that she is at very high risk of severe heat illness, and that the constant extreme heat is going to exacerbate her heart disease.

[Solutions:]

There aren't any medications I can give Mrs. Ramirez to prevent heat illness, but I did fill out a form to get her some assistance with electricity bill payments so she'd have a little extra money to fix the AC, and I've started working with the City to see if they can plant more trees in neighborhoods. Climate change is impacting people now, and we really need to take action urgently.

[Value:]

It just seems like the right thing to do to take some simple steps to protect people like Mrs. Ramirez from extreme heat. That's also why it's so important to me that our leaders take climate change seriously and will work hard to protect our health and our climate.

Extreme Heat and Energy Costs

My name is Candace Concerned. I'm an internist in Talahasee Florida. I've spent my career caring for underserved people like Ms. Anna Mae. Anna Mae is a retired clerical worker living on a fixed income in a black and brown community where the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have hit hard.

But if her worries about COVID-19 weren't enough, she's on the front lines of a health emergency that's affecting all of us: climate change. As the temperatures in Florida have gone up, the extreme heat and humidity is making it harder for her to breathe. She's spending more money on inhalers and wondering how she's going to pay her bills and continue caring for her grandchildren. If her power is shut off, she will have no air conditioning. That would be life threatening.

Seeing patients like Ms. Anna Mae makes me realize that doctors need to speak out. Just like COVID-19, the sooner we listen to scientists and take action to prevent harm to people's health, the better off all of us will be.

The good news is that there is much we can do here in Florida and across the country. Even simple things, like planting trees and providing cooling stations on hot days, can make a big difference.

If we take on climate change – together – there's even better news for our health. By making all of communities more resilient and switching away from fossil fuels to renewable energy, we can improve everyone's health immediately and provide a better future not just for Anna Mae's grandchildren, but for all of our grandchildren as well.

That's why I support leaders who are working for climate solutions.

Pollution and Infant Health

Hi! I am Dr. Carina Caring. I have been a pediatrician working with Native Americans in rural Oklahoma for over 30 years. I still have a very vivid memory of my first patient who died, during my training to be a pediatrician, from what we then called a crib death. I can still see that mother in a rocking chair with her lifeless baby and I can still hear the traditional song she sang in my head. I have cared for many more moms and dads who lost babies to what we now call Sudden Unexplained Infant Deaths or SUIDs and it has never gotten easier.

When I was in training, we did not even know that cigarette smoking increased the risk of these deaths; that is common knowledge now. What is NOT common knowledge is that ANY air pollution increases the risk – fossil fuel power plants and car exhausts included. When pregnant moms breathe in dirty air, they expose their babies to toxics. Even though we can't say for sure that any particular case is due to air pollution, We know that air pollution increases the risk of premature birth, and of Sudden Unexplained Infant Death.

Knowledge is power and we all want solutions that save babies and children's lives. If we transition to clean electric vehicles and away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, we can reduce the air pollution that increases the harms to health, including the increased risk of babies that die of sudden deaths or the number of children with bad asthma. Some cities and states and businesses are already working on this solution, but we need our leaders to adopt policies that make the transition happen much more quickly and across the nation.

The parents of my patients care about their children's health. I care too, and I'm concerned for our future generations. That's why I support leaders who will act quickly to protect our children and future generations, from air pollution and from climate change.

Maternal Health

My name is Selma Strong , and I live in Detroit Michigan. I'm an Ob/Gyn physician and a mom, and both roles are for life. Once you are either, you can never return to your former way of being or thinking.

I had the great good fortune of delivering thousands of babies into the world. There's probably no more joyous event to be part of, especially when you're a mom yourself. But among those thousands of joyous experiences, I've also experienced the heartbreak of babies born very prematurely. Some were left with complications that change their lives and the lives of their families forever. Some didn't survive.

We are always faced with the same agonizing questions. Why was my baby born prematurely? Is there something I could have done differently? I asked the similar questions when my daughter, just 28 years old, developed breast cancer. Why did she get cancer?

For any individual, the scientific answer is that we can never know for sure. But science is now telling us something else as well – that the air pollution and toxic chemicals in our environment increase the risk for premature birth and for cancers in young adults. And global warming is making air pollution worse. That's why climate change is a health emergency.

You don't have to be a doctor or a mother to agree that when there's something we can do to save babies and young people's lives, we've got to act on it. We can encourage pregnant women and young people to be healthy to improve their odds, but we need policies that push hard and fast to replace fossil fuels with renewable energy. We need leaders who will protect us from climate change and air pollution. That's why I support leaders who make it clear they will fight for our health.

Cancer and Fossil Fuels Pollution

My name is Patricia Peace, and I live in Wisconsin. For over 30 years in my job as a surgical pathologist has been to look at tiny biopsy specimens to find out what is making a patient sick.

Looking through the microscope, each slide tells the story of a person's life and helps me learn more about a person's illness - information that helps decide the best treatment choices for each patient. Each case is like a puzzle: the tissue in one biopsy from someone's stomach looks blue, too many inflammatory cells - and then I see the tiny seagull-shaped bacteria. This patient has a common and easily treated infection.

The hardest cases for me are when I see the tell-tale bizarrely shaped cells of a rapidly growing cancer. I know that I'm seeing something that will be devastating for the patient and their loved ones. I may not be the one to pass on the bad news, but it's never gotten easier for me to be the one who makes that diagnosis.

It's especially sad for me to make a diagnosis of lung cancer in a patient who has never smoked. We're learning more every day about how toxic air pollution from diesel exhaust or power plant pollution causes cancer and heart disease, like breathing second hand smoke. I think about all the kids who live near refineries or busy highways, and wonder how many of them will have to hear that diagnosis. That same pollution is causing climate change, which is a global health emergency.

That's why it's so important to me that our leaders will fight for strong clean air standards that will protect kids from toxic air pollution and from climate change. I want leaders who understand that our health and our air and our climate are interconnected, and who are committed to taking action now to protect our climate and our health.

Flooding and Hope

My name is Henry Hopeful. I'm speaking as a father, a physician, and on behalf of the MidWest Medical Society the state's largest physician organization.

As a rural family doctor in the upper Midwest. I take care of people in my community from birth to death. September 12, 2014 is a day I remember with joy and sadness. Joy because it was the day my son was born. Sadness because that day my community and my patients were struck by a devastating flood that caused broken dams, made it impossible for physicians and nurses to get to work at our hospital, and destroyed the homes and businesses of many living along the Midwest River. For some this was the second or third time and now these major floods are becoming more frequent due to climate change.

I also remember that day with fear and with hope. I see patients struggle to rebuild after a flood, trying to take care of their children and their own chronic illnesses when they are struggling to recover their homes and livelihoods. I fear that my son will grow up in a world where that type of devastation and disruption is the norm if we don't slow down climate pollution as quickly as we can.

But I'm hopeful because if communities like mine can come together to rebuild, we can come together to take action to reduce climate pollution, and to make our communities safer and more flood resilient. I do my best to take care of my patients and my community. But our leaders in government need to do their part to protect the health and well-being of my son into the future. That's why I want elected leaders who care about health and about the climate, and are willing to take real action to protect both.

Air pollution, climate, and physical activity

My name is Alicia Advocate, I'm a pediatrician in Cincinnati Ohio, and a member of the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

I have a patient who's ten. He has really bad asthma, and he's also obese. I've been encouraging him over time to get out and exercise. Recently I was so excited - he came in for a physical because he decided to join a summer sports program. I said that's so awesome - congratulations!

Unfortunately I also had to give him and his parents a little warning about checking the air quality every day before practice, and skipping outdoor practice on bad air quality days. Cleveland has a real problem with poor air quality - from traffic, from power plants that are burning fossil fuels. And now we have more heat days from climate change that are causing worse smog. Climate change really is a health emergency.

It's so unfair that kids can't do what they are supposed to be doing in the summertime, especially for kids like this little guy, where activity is so critical for his health. He's just facing so many issues - super hot days and poor air quality and allergens - It's a recipe to trigger his asthma. And it's so unfortunate, because we want him to be outside playing and active. It feels very unfair that he can't go out when that's what I've been recommending, because he doesn't have clean air to breathe. And it's getting worse.

If I could wave a magic wand. I'd like to see us move more quickly to using renewable energy - clean and renewable energy to clean up the air pollution and fight climate change. . It's why it's so important to me to elect leaders who support clean air and strong Climate Action today - for the sake of the health of our children.