

'Green Gait' - The Growing Relevance of Podiatric Medicine amid Climate Change

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Abstract : Background The health sector, whose mission is protecting health, also contributes to the climate crisis, the greatest health threat of the 21st century. The carbon footprint from healthcare exceeds 5% of emissions globally, surpassing 7% in the USA and Australia. Global recognition has led to the Paris Agreement, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the World Health Organization's Climate Change Action Plan. It is agreed that the majority of health impacts stem from energy and resource consumption, as well as the production of greenhouse gases in the environment and deforestation. Many professional medical associations and healthcare providers advocate for their members to take the lead in environmental sustainability. Objectives To avail and expand 'Green Podiatry' via the three pillars of: Exercise ; Evidence ; Everyday changes; to highlight the benefits of physical activity and exercise for both human health and planet health. Walking and running are beneficial for health, provide low carbon transport, and have evidence-based health benefits. Podiatrists are key healthcare professionals in the physical activity space and can influence and guide their patients to increase physical activity and avert the many non-communicable diseases that are decimating public health, eg diabetes, arthritis, depression, cancer, obesity. Methods Publications, conference presentations, and pilot projects pertinent to 'Green Podiatry' have been activated since 2021, and a survey of podiatrist's knowledge and awareness has been undertaken. The survey assessed attitudes towards environmental sustainability in work environment. The questions addressed commuting habits, hours of physical exercise per week, and attitudes in the clinic, such as prescribing unnecessary treatments or emphasizing sports as primary treatment. Results Teaching and Learning modules have been developed for podiatric medicine students and graduates globally. These will be availed. A pilot foot orthoses recycling project has been undertaken and will be reported, in addition to established footwear recycling. The preliminary survey found almost 90% of respondents had no knowledge of green podiatry or footwear recycling. Only 30% prescribe sports/exercise as the primary treatment for patients, and 45% do not to prescribe unnecessary treatments. Conclusions Podiatrists are in a good position to lead in the crucial area of healthcare and climate change implications. Sufficient education of podiatrists is essential for the profession to beneficially promote health and physical activity, which is beneficial for the health of all peoples and all communities.

Keywords : climate change, gait, green, healthcare, sustainability

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