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Septembre 1988

10.60
Original: English

WORLD MEDICAL ASSOCIATION DECLARATION
on
THE ROLE OF PHYSICIANS IN ENVIRONMENTAL
AND DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES

Adopted by the 40th World Medical Assembly
Vienna, Austria, September 1988

Introduction

The effective practice of medicine requires that physicians and their professional associations address environmental and demographic issues that can influence the health status of both individuals and large populations. Broadly speaking, these issues all concern the quality and availability of those resources that are necessary for the maintenance of health and ultimately of life itself.

Specifically, environmental issues have four dimensions that in the long and short-term influence health:

- A. The need to halt the degradation of the environment so that resources necessary for life and health, e.g. clean air and water, can be available to all. The persistent chemical and waste contamination of our fresh water supplies and of our atmosphere with hydrocarbons can have severe medical consequences.
- B. The need to control the use of nonrenewable resources, e.g. top soil and oil, so that they can provide benefits to future generations.
- C. The need to utilize reasonable and universal family planning methods so that a sustainable society is maintained and medical resources remain available.
- D. The need to mobilize resources across national boundaries in order to develop broad, internationally based solutions to these broad, internationally based problems.

The primary objective of this declaration is to increase the awareness for maintaining the necessary balance between environmental resources on the one hand and the biological and social requirements for health on the other. From the perspective of the physician, neither exponential population growth nor the irresponsible destruction of the environment is acceptable. Throughout the world, organized medicine should stand as an advocate for resolving these issues.

Principles

1. As an element in their representation of physicians, medical societies should consider environmental issues. This consideration can include the identification of problems that have a particular local urgency; efforts to improve the enforcement of already existing laws on environmental issues; and the identification of health issues that have their roots in environmental problems.
 2. Medical societies should promote family planning measures that are medically and ethically sound. The goal of such measures will not be to inhibit the personal autonomy of individuals but rather to enrich the quality of life for all family members and for the continuation of all forms of life on the planet.
 3. The WMA should serve as an international forum on the medical impact of environmental and demographic issues and should provide a forum for coordinating the international efforts by physicians and medical societies on the many such issues that must be addressed internationally.
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