A message from Dr. Peter Yellowlees, Chief Wellness Officer

COVID-19 and climate change...Responding to both global threats

Many of you are, like me, thinking of how we reopen our economy, our lives and our workplace. What will it be like, this “new normal” as it is commonly known? How will life be different? Will some things be better?

There are reports that our “shelter in place” orders have led to significant decreases in global carbon emissions which makes us wonder if this pandemic will affect climate change in the long-term. Should we be taking this into account when we think about reopening our society post-COVID?

The answer is simple. COVID-19 and climate change are inextricably linked. They both exacerbate each other. They both require preventive approaches. What we learn about each one can teach us about the other. They both intersect in their impact on health care. And they are both areas that we can positively influence by lifestyle changes. Both affect our breathing!

Can I suggest you read this excellent blog by Josh Karliner HERE, and a series of interesting articles described HERE.

There are several areas of interplay between COVID-19 and climate change.

1. They have similar underlying causes, habitat destruction, which leads animals and humans into greater proximity causing increased zoonotic diseases as well as increased greenhouse gas emissions. The World Health Organization now says that deforestation is a major driver of
infectious disease outbreaks.

2. They feed on each other as health threat multipliers in several ways:
   * Air pollution from any cause makes us more vulnerable to COVID-19, while compromised respiratory systems, such as caused by COVID-19, make us more vulnerable to air pollution, including smoking.
   * Food insecurity, and potentially malnutrition, occurs in both through plague and crop destruction combined with economic factors and fragile supply chains.
   * A warming climate encourages changes in migratory viruses associated with bats, as well as reducing the diversity of numerous animal species, which increases the risk of zoonotic infections.
   * Human migrations caused by wars, droughts and poverty and other travel related to climate change lead to more infectious disease dissemination.

3. The U.S. health care system is woefully unprepared for both. We know that health care is responsible in the U.S. for about 10% of national greenhouse gas emissions but is doing little to reduce the amount of population sickness it is causing. And we have seen the recent horror stories of PPE insufficiencies, and the lack of testing and contact tracing programs. Public health programs nationally are dramatically underfunded, and the socially and demographically most vulnerable groups in our population are most at risk from both.

There are things we can do now and, in the future, to mitigate many of these challenges. Many of the changes we have been making in response to COVID-19 are also helpful in reducing carbon emissions and combating climate change. These are changes that we should continue:
   * Increased use of video visits for patient care and for meetings
   * Remote technology-enabled patient monitoring
   * Improved more efficient clinical workflows that are less dependent on the physical presence of key individuals
   * More teleworking and flexible hours when appropriate
   * Virtual conferences to avoid car and air travel
   * Increased exercise (biking and walking, with more showers and changing facilities on our campus)
   * Less red meat and more vegetables in our diets
   * Less use of single use items, containers and plastic items when appropriate from an infection perspective

At a macro level we also clearly need to carefully re-examine our supply chains, while continuing to keep our business building footprint as green, efficient, clean and small as possible.

It is fascinating how many similarities and areas of overlap there are between COVID-19 and climate change, and how we can learn from each of them about solutions that are relevant to the other.

Let’s focus on some of these changes that will be good for the health of all of us as we move forward. I encourage you to send in suggestions on this topic. We have a lot to learn from each other.
P3 PACU Boarding
“All of the OR staff made me feel very comfortable and cared for. I appreciated that each
person introduced themselves to me prior to surgery. My husband appreciated the text
message updates.”

Same Day Surgery Center
“I had an excellent experience and after managing an outpatient surgery center, your center is
a well oiled machine. Everyone worked well together.”

ENT Clinic Glassrock
“Everyone at this office is nothing short of amazing! Nurses always make me feel so
comfortable and the combination of their and all the doctors’ extensive knowledge and
experience is so very comforting.”

Emergency Pavilion
“Excellent customer service in filling out insurance papers. Friendly, professional staff.”

D12 Surgical Specialties
“I was surprised how good the food was and the variety of choices.”