

Healing Our Planet: A Call to Action From the Pediatric Community

GV Basavaraja

National President
Indian Academy of Pediatrics, 2024
president@iapindia.org

As the sweltering summer sets new heat records across the globe, it also urges us to contribute our bit and save the Earth. Each prescription written and every procedure performed in the hospital leaves an indelible ecological footprint. Biomedical waste (BMW) including cytotoxic waste, sharps and general waste, so generated poses a huge environmental burden. Challenges in BMW management can be daunting as ineffective management at any stage, from generation to disposal, has the potential to cause serious consequences [1]. While incineration of medical wastes leads to air pollution, the huge amount of plastic waste generated in hospitals adds to the complexities of disposal of BMW. The ideal BMW management methods should aim at curbing the generation of waste at the source itself in addition to recovering as much waste as possible. Proper segregation and disposal of BMW and innovative waste management technologies like recycling and repurposing can minimize pollution and maximize resource recovery.

Our commitment to sustainability can be aided with simple yet impactful measures such as the adoption of paperless presentations and communications. Over 40% of the trees felled for industrial purpose are consumed in the production of paper. The paper and pulp industry is one of the largest emitters of greenhouse gases among the manufacturing industries and is also the single largest industrial consumer of water. Production of a single A4-sheet of paper not only consumes upto a whopping 13 litres of water but also siphons off energy considering the additional burden of transportation and distribution. Chemicals and inks used for printing compound the environmental pollution. By eschewing traditional paper-based methods, we can not only conserve precious resources but also mitigate the ecological impact of deforestation and pollution. *Indian Pediatrics*, the flagship journal of our Academy, launched the much needed 'Go Green Initiative' in 2018 itself and led the drive from the front [2]. With seamless digital access to publications, it is now possible to disseminate knowledge and information effectively using digital technology sans paper.

Adopting simple measures like digitization of health records and transitioning to digital databases will not only reduce our reliance on finite resources but will also enhance the efficiency manifold.

As pediatricians, it is our duty to cultivate environmentally conscious behaviors in children. Encouraging simple actions like switching off lights/fans when not in use, closing running taps while brushing teeth, sorting recyclables or planting trees, can help children understand their role in protecting the environment. Afforestation and awareness drives carried out in schools and neighboring areas can be a useful tool to this effect.

Unfortunately, the consequences of environmental degradation are disproportionately borne by children, the most vulnerable members of the society, who may present with myriad symptoms and signs like anemia, shortness of breath, confusion, delirium, nausea, vomiting, failure to thrive and myalgia. As advocates for pediatric health, we must leverage our expertise and influence to demand policy reforms including stricter regulations and cleaner industrial practices.

As we commemorate the World Environment Day on the 5th of June, let us embark on a journey towards a future where medicine heals not just the body, but the Earth itself. As the #GenerationRestoration, let us resolve to create a future where trees stand tall and forests thrive in harmony with humans and animals [3].

REFERENCES

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