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Climate change: defeating misinformation with trusted knowledge

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Finland's first planetary health physician is prescribing "walking home barefoot through nature" (doi:10.1136/bmj.q2093).¹ Meanwhile, only 27% of Republicans who are registered to vote in the forthcoming US election say that they prefer a candidate who supports climate action (doi:10.1136/bmj.q2183).² The equivalent figure among Democrats is 90%. Much depends on the outcome of that election, especially as the Republican Party is not only intent on burning more fossil fuels but is expected to "dismantle efforts to protect climate and health." This should be enough for people to decide how to vote, although the Democrats are also misguided in their plans to increase oil and gas development. What can be done when the world's dominant political force is abdicating responsibility for the planet? Knowledge, as ever, is power.

The ask for health professionals, healthcare organisations, and all citizens is clear. Links between climate change and harms to human and planetary health are well established, such as how infectious diseases are worsening (doi:10.1136/bmj-2024-079343).³ A new global study shows the damaging impact of severe rainfall on health outcomes (doi:10.1136/bmj-2024-080944 doi:10.1136/bmj.q2053),^{4,5} and the list of harmful effects of extreme heat continues to grow (doi:10.1136/bmj.q2175 doi:10.1136/bmj.q1380).^{6,7} The global food system is now responsible for almost a third of greenhouse gas emissions, second only to the aviation industry (doi:10.1136/bmj.q2157 doi:10.1136/bmj.q1906).^{8,9}

What's changing, however, is that solutions are becoming clearer (doi:10.1136/bmj-2023-077674).¹⁰ A systematic review identifies the strategies, tactics, models, and tools that can help decarbonise healthcare systems to help achieve net zero (doi:10.1136/bmj-2024-081284).¹¹ One of the most prominent of the nine themes identified is changing clinical and surgical practice, and our series on sustainable practice examines the carbon benefits of switching from inhaled to intravenous general anaesthesia (doi:10.1136/bmj-2024-079323).¹² Our planetary obligations are being codified (doi:10.1136/bmj.q1965),¹³ and the importance of child health and wellbeing is central (doi:10.1136/bmj.q2056).¹⁴

Yet the forces of misinformation and disinformation continue to attack the reality of climate change and its links to health (doi:10.1136/bmj.q2187).¹⁵ False narratives flourish on social media, unchecked and amplified by (as Kasabian put it) algorithms taking control. Artificial intelligence adds a new dimension to disseminating false information. We can react, say Piatek and colleagues: we can strengthen public health messaging from trusted health professionals and media. We can work with tech companies to

tackle the spread of misinformation. We can use AI for good, to identify misinformation. We can educate (doi:10.1136/bmj.q1870),¹⁶ we can empower people with critical thinking, and we can intensify our activism and advocacy (doi:10.1136/bmj.q1888 doi:10.1136/bmj.q2107 doi:10.1136/bmj.q2162).¹⁷⁻¹⁹

At *The BMJ* we are restating our climate commitments, which include tightening up our advertising policy and considering the future of our weekly print edition (doi:10.1136/bmj.q2197).²⁰ We choose to act to build hope in a better future. We urge readers, armed with knowledge, to do the same. And, when dealing with the emotional turmoil that the climate crisis triggers, we might turn for solace to the growing genre of "cli-fi," or climate fiction (doi:10.1136/bmj.q1734),²¹ wherein Arthurian knights return from the dead to save Britain (doi:10.1136/bmj.q1790)²² and a wildfire creeps towards Berkeley, California (doi:10.1136/bmj.q1825).²³ When fact and fiction point in the same direction, we cannot abdicate our responsibility to people and planet.

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