How Medical Professionals Can Speak About the Health Harms of Climate Change
Interview Guidance from the Medical Society Consortium on Climate and Health

Tips and Strategies for Successful Interviews:
The core message you should communicate is: *climate change is real and caused by humans; it’s harming our health here and now; but, we know we can address climate change and improve health immediately.*

- **Start with Health**: Research shows that medical professionals are a trusted messenger. People expect you to speak about health, so start there and then connect it to climate change.

- **Stick to Your Expertise**: Don’t feel like you must speak to public policy or details of climate science. Confirm that more than 97% of climate scientists agree human-caused climate change is happening and turn back to discuss what you know best: the health impacts.

- **Use Stories About People**: Be ready with examples from your patients that bring the harms associated with climate change to life.

- **Be Solution-Oriented**: Always include the message that we have hope and that clean, renewable energy can *improve health today* and *protect the climate and our health in the long-term*.

Priority Messages

1. **In communities across the nation, climate change is harming our health now.**
   - Doctors know this because we’re seeing the health of our patients being harmed.
   - Climate change affects everything from heat-related illness, worsening chronic illnesses like lung and heart conditions, including asthma, injuries and deaths from dangerous weather events, and infectious diseases spread by mosquitoes and ticks. [You can substitute examples that are especially relevant to your region.]
   - The health of any American can be harmed by climate change, but some of us face greater risks than others. Children, student athletes, pregnant women, the elderly, people with chronic illnesses and allergies, and the poor are more likely to be harmed.

2. **There is a scientific consensus that human-caused climate change is happening.**
   - More than 97 percent of climate scientists agree.

3. **Unless we take concerted action, these harms to our health are going to get much worse.**
   - As a health professional, I have a duty to protect people from further harm. I’m doing that speaking out to address climate change.
   - The sooner we act, the more harm we can prevent, and the more we can protect the health of all Americans.

4. **The most important action we can take to protect our health is to accelerate the transition to clean, renewable energy.**
   - This will limit climate change and has the added benefit of rapidly cleaning up our air and water so that we can all enjoy better health. Everybody wants clean air and water, and better health.
   - It is well within our power to accomplish this. Efficient buildings, neighborhoods that are walkable, bikeable and have public transportation, and smart energy policies are all essential and achievable.
Messages about Each Health Risk

Note: You should be familiar with all in case you’re asked, but you can choose 2-3 to focus on and speak to most. Choose the risk factors that you are most comfortable speaking about and will resonate with your audience (for example, if you’re in an area prone to wildfires or Lyme disease, speak to those risks).

• **More extreme heat, extreme weather and air pollution caused by climate change is making us sicker.**
  - **Air Pollution:** The quality of the air we breathe is getting worse. Whether it’s pollen in the air because of earlier and longer springs or dangerous particles in the air because of drought or wildfires or more smog because of heat, people are sicker because of the changes to our air. And it’s not just people with lung conditions—poor air quality also causes heart problems and can affect the developing lungs of children.
  - **Heat:** More frequent heat waves, greater humidity and extreme temperatures causes more heat illness and are dangerous for children, pregnant women and people with chronic conditions like lung and heart disease. People who work outdoors, the elderly, and people on certain medicines are also likely to suffer more than others from heat.
  - **Extreme Weather:** Extreme weather, like storms, floods, and droughts are happening more frequently and are more severe. These events cause injuries and make it harder for patients to get to health care. In some cases, it can even make water and food supplies unsafe.

• **Climate change is changing how disease spreads.**
  - From ticks and mosquitoes spreading to new parts of the country to food and water that can be contaminated because of changing climate, flooding and extreme weather.
  - Earlier springs and changing weather patterns are causing us to see diseases that are spread by mosquitoes or ticks in new parts of the country and in more seasons. Whether it’s Lyme disease or West Nile virus, patients are growing increasingly concerned.
  - Changing rain patterns, flooding and increasing temperatures are producing dangerous algae blooms in lakes threatening drinking water and recreation, and can promote the growth of bacteria and parasites like *Salmonella*, *E. coli* and *Vibrio*.

• **Climate change also harms our well-being.**
  - A changing climate can make our food less nutritious and extreme weather can separate people from their families and communities. Hotter days can also impact mental health and behavior.
Frequently Asked (Tough) Questions

Note: these questions use “doctor” but they are applicable to any health care worker or discipline.

• You’re a doctor, how much do you really know about the science of climate change?

  I know that climate change is real and caused by humans because more than 97% of climate scientists agree on this. But more importantly, I see how it is affecting patients in my offices every day. [INSERT STORY OR LOCAL EXAMPLE]

• As a doctor, shouldn’t you be more concerned with health reform or health care issues? [Alternatively, the question should be about focusing on insurers or some other health policy issue.]

  As a doctor, my priority is the health of my patients. I’m speaking out and advocating because it’s fundamental to how well I can treat my patients. Not all medicine is about treating illness once it’s happened. This is really preventative care.

• Isn’t this just a partisan attack?

  This isn’t about politics. The Medical Society Consortium represents more than half the nation’s doctors from across the political spectrum. A patient’s health has nothing to do with the political views of the medical team or the patient. We all suffer the health impacts of climate change.

• How can you attribute asthma increases (or other health harm) to climate change?

  The research is clear that climate change is increasing frequency and intensity of many of these threats to our health. None of these risks are new, but climate change is changing how it impacts Americans. [INSERT SPECIFIC EXAMPLE – i.e., wildfires or changes in pollen season or extreme weather]