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## Climate Change and the PSO-HNS

**Times have changed** and seasons have changed. I remember with nostalgia the cool December mornings of my childhood, the predictable rains, the smell of clean air in open city spaces, and the sight of stars in the evening sky. There were fewer cars on the road then, travel time was much faster, and there were more rice fields to be seen by the road as one left the city limits.

How different things are now. How amazingly fast have changes happened in one lifetime. Where the trees and cogon fields once were, buildings now stand. The city is immersed in a soup of soot and chemicals. The sky is grey and, sometimes, light brown. So many vehicles clog the city's thoroughfares. My eyes tear with the chemicals in the air. The heat is worrisome. I have to deal with a chronic cough that improves with asthma medications or disappears whenever I leave the city for a cleaner environment. My sense of smell has greatly declined with the increased time and frequency of my driving through the city roads. Worse, the wonderful December mornings that heralded the coming of Christmas are gone... they have been gone for a long time.

Is this what I want to bequeath to my children? Is this what you want for the generations to come? Are we going to fail as the previous generations have? What is it going to take to save our environment and avert climate change?

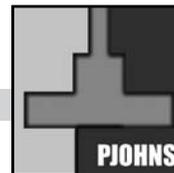
Acting in numbers often gets results faster than acting alone. On my own, I have been trying to make a difference but, now, I look to the specialty society that I belong to as a vehicle for greater change. As more and more people are realizing the urgency of actions to save the environment that sustains us, I am sure that there are members in the Philippine Society of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (PSO-HNS) who are willing to commit themselves to actions and lifestyle changes for a safe planet.

The PSO-HNS is ideally positioned to make a difference. Spread throughout the country, we, its members, see patients who suffer from environmentally influenced and lifestyle influenced illnesses. Thus, we know what effects worsening climate conditions can have on health. We are in a position, not just to prescribe appropriate medications, but also to reach out and give meaningful advice.

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To give convincing advice to patients, we must start with ourselves. Seventeen years ago, I began a journey that I ask my colleagues to now take. To decrease garbage and lessen wastage, I began to segregate my garbage into dry paper products, tin and aluminum products, glass and recyclable plastic products, dry non-recyclable items, organic material, and wet non-recyclable materials. I would bring my newspapers, dry paper products, glass and plastic items, old rubber tires, and old car batteries to a junk shop. Later on, I would not have to do this anymore since garbage men and other individuals would come to the house to pick up the items that they could sell for recycling. The wet garbage went into my garden soil and into a composting drum.

Even now, I re-use envelopes, gift wrappers, ribbons, and papers with print on only one side. I use baskets, not plastic bags when I buy my fruits and vegetables at the organic market. I bring my own stainless steel and glass food containers when I buy cooked food in the same market.

To decrease the amount of chemicals that seep back into the environment, I refrain from the use of chemical sprays and artificial scents at home. I do not use chemicals in my garden. I don't burn garbage. I don't use diesel as a fuel. I regularly maintain my vehicles to keep them running efficiently. I plan my trips to lessen my contribution to air pollution. I support and patronize organic food growers as well as producers of natural products. I have greatly decreased my family's use of plastic food containers. Every chance I have, I encourage people to minimize their use of chemicals, plastic and styrofoam.

Knowing that the earth's resources are used inefficiently with meat-centered diets, I eat more vegetables than meat. After all, it does not make sense to use so much land and energy to plant crops for feeding cows when we could use the land to plant vegetables and fruit-bearing trees for direct human consumption!

As we develop ourselves into role models, it shall become easier to talk about environmental concerns to those around us. The PSO-HNS must make a stand on threats to the environment and the need to actively address the problem of climate change. It must make this stand public. Then it must affiliate itself with other groups that are committed to saving the environment.

The Society could launch information campaigns on the interconnections of environment, lifestyle and otorhinolaryngologic health. It could tap its own members as speakers or initiate joint projects with other like-minded organizations. In the early 90's, I organized a symposium in my hospital with air pollution as the topic. The speakers were specialists and non-doctors who were knowledgeable about the subject matter. Even at that time, the

increased appreciation for environmental discussions was obvious with so many people in the audience. The interest that information campaigns would generate now would definitely be greater!

The Society could raise funds and sponsor activities that increase environmental awareness and create positive results for the environment. How about raising money with a fun run or fun walkathon in the *La Mesa Dam Nature Reserve*? Why not a Doctors on Bikes event to underscore the significance of fuel-less travel? Or a Doctors Go Organic Festival? Perhaps a *Mahabang Buhay sa Gulay* activity? We could also do a *Tulong sa Ilong, Tulong sa Kapaligiran* mission wherein giving medical help is coupled with lectures on lifestyle and environment. We could collate and publish the contents of our environment and lifestyle lectures and sell these or give away to patients. We could incorporate environment games in our Society sportsfest during conventions. We could come up with PSO-HNS recipes (for health of self and environment), nose-friendly natural aromatherapy oils, ear-friendly biodegradable cotton tips, and recyclable masks and sell these in our clinics, at conventions and in organic markets.

In the PSO-HNS office as well as PSO-HNS conventions, the commitment to the environment must be evident. The use of long-lasting low wattage lights, recycled paper, natural soaps and scents, prudent use of electricity, and environmental posters on the walls will strengthen the society's image as a champion for the planet. During conventions, pharmaceuticals may be required to use only recyclable, non-glossy fliers and posters. These same companies may be reminded to refrain from giving away non-recyclable souvenirs. The convention bag should be made of natural, not synthetic material. Certificates of attendance should be given only to those who need them. Clothing made from natural materials should be encouraged. Meals may focus more on salads, grains, vegetables and fruits and less on meats.

After starting with ourselves and reaching out to others, the PSO-HNS could go international! Strengthened by local experience, the society could embark on international pro-environment activities in coordination with otorhinolaryngology organizations in other countries.

The PSO-HNS, having interests in health, science, and otorhinolaryngology, has great potential to be an agent for change. I hope my passion for nature shall become its collective passion too. This society is blessed with intelligent, highly skilled, creative, and similarly abled individuals capable of using its influence and resources to make a significant contribution towards saving the environment. My cool December mornings may never come back, but the PSO-HNS can still help avert the slide towards planet disaster!