

EXPLORING A PLANETARY HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19 | JUNE 12, 2020



This webinar, co-hosted by **Irish Doctors for the environment (IDE)** focused on discussing how this pandemic can serve as a turning point for planetary health. Planetary health is a relatively new global health concept that refers to the health of humans but also the state of the natural ecosystems upon which we depend. In 2015, the **Rockefeller Foundation** and **The Lancet** launched the **Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on Planetary Health**. The **Planetary Health Alliance** was then founded with their support in 2016. It now has 200+ member institutions from 40+ countries. One of these is the IDE group, which is active on issues such as healthcare waste, medical curriculum, green prescribing and air quality.

Four expert panellists joined **Guest Moderator, Rosie James**, global health and medical student and **IGHN** board member, and **Hala Ali, Coordinator of ESTHER Alliance** to discuss these issues and proposed solutions in different contexts. The aim was to have an interactive conversation on how the world can move forward from this pandemic more sustainably, leaving no-one behind, especially marginalized groups who are often most susceptible to the effects of climate change and infectious diseases.

RENZO GUINTO

A Filipino physician working at the nexus of global health and sustainable development, Renzo Guinto, MD DrPH is the **Chief Planetary Doctor of PH Lab** – a “*glo-cal think-and-do tank*” for advancing the health of both people and the planet. Renzo recently finished his Doctor of Public Health degree at Harvard University, where he investigated the concept of “*climate-smart*” health systems in coastal municipalities in the Philippines. Renzo is also a member of the **Editorial Advisory Board of The Lancet Planetary Health** and **Adviser to the Lancet One Health Commission**.

“There is enough knowledge about what’s happening in the environment and its linkages to human health. We cannot wait for another clinical trial or another evidence synthesis to remind the global community that business as usual has to stop.”

TOP POINTS:

- It has taken us 21 climate negotiations to come up with the Paris Climate Agreement. This shows the concerning lack of global commitment for planetary health.
- In contrast to pandemic-driven lockdowns, we need decarbonization that is intentional and planned, taking into account all the side effects of such massive reforms while protecting human health.
- When it comes to food, the evidence is clear: we should be eating less red and processed meat. It does not only emit lots of carbon; it also has been declared a carcinogen by the WHO, increases the risk of zoonotic leap, and is known to contribute to antimicrobial resistance. Shifting our diet is a quadruple win for human and planetary health!
- To enable a Health-in-All-Policies approach for people and the planet, health professionals need to be proactive in communicating and collaborating with other sectors. After all, every sector is a health sector.



TARA SHINE

Tara holds a **PhD in Environmental Science**. She has been working for the past 20 years as a climate change negotiator and adviser on environmental policy at the international level, before setting up **Change by Degrees**, which is a sustainability consultancy based in County Cork. Tara is the author of the book ‘*How to Save Your Planet One Object At A Time*’, a science communicator and TV presenter. She is also the incoming chair of the **Board of the International Institute for Environment and Development**.

www.tarashine.com | www.changebydegrees.com

“I think the **SDGs** are a fantastic framework for us to understand how all these things are interlinked. We cannot tackle climate change if we do not tackle inequality. The same thing applies for health.”

TOP POINTS:

- There have been both positive and negative effects of the pandemic on the environment. Travel bans have improved air quality globally, however, there has been massive healthcare sector waste and pollution, from disposable PPE, for example. But to achieve the goal of net zero carbon emissions by 2050, we need to actually change policies. These temporary measures are not enough.
- The shrinking space for the natural world is damaging to human health, as we disturb and damage ecosystems and increase contact between human and animals, some of which are vectors for infectious disease.
- Vulnerable populations are most at risk to the impacts of climate change and infectious disease. Our response must consider these inequalities.
- Human rights – to food, water, livelihoods, shelter – are a really good way for us to advocate for better planetary health.



LANVIN CONCESSAO

Lanvin Concessao is a **Project Associate at the World Resources Institute (WRI) India**. His primary area of work is studying the role of energy for development in remote and rural parts of India, particularly in the health, education and livelihood sectors, with a focus on energy poor Indian states that are vulnerable to the impact of climate change.

“We are working to improve sustainable energy access to ensure access to health services are maintained during the pandemic, but also to adapt to increasing climatic events and natural disasters.”

TOP POINTS:

- Challenges to implementing sustainable energy are primarily around the lack of integration of four vital domains: Policy, Finance, Technology and Data.
- Interactive maps can help understand linkages between energy access and health indicators, and allow users to identify target geographies that need resilient healthcare infrastructure.



DR AOIFE KIRK

Dr Aoife Kirk is one of the co-founders of **Irish Doctors for the Environment**, and is currently working with the **HSE** Public Health team as **Senior Medical Officer** during the COVID19 response. She was introduced to planetary health through the MPH from the **London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine**, and works alongside the **WONCA Working Party on the Environment** to create planetary health education content for primary care physicians worldwide.

“We really do need long term plans. We can't afford to be thinking short term. We really need to be engaging in the debate about how to create sustainable public health systems that will manage the next shock.”

TOP POINTS:

- Climate change is one of the greatest global health threats of the 21st century
- The planetary health framework provides an overall lens for tackling injustices from both bottom-up and top-down approaches.
- We will need to emerge from both pandemics (COVID-19 and racism) by tackling systemic injustices and building resilient healthy societies in a more equitable manner
- Healthcare providers can engage with the movement by acting locally. Start a discussion with colleagues on how to educate each other, your patients, and the public. For example, about the importance of active transport, sourcing sustainable healthy food, and advocating for the inclusion of planetary health in medical curriculum.
- As physicians, we need to continue to educate ourselves and advocate for patients on these urgent public health issues



RESOURCES

If you are a healthcare provider in Ireland, you can join IDE at www.ide.ie/join-us

Read this **BMJ Blog** written by IDE about opportunities for cities to advancing planetary health.

Read **The 2018 Canmore Declaration: Statement of Principles for Planetary Health**

Planetary Health Alliance

The Lancet Planetary Health Journal