Why I Care About Climate Change

By Larry S. Freeman, M.D., Private practice, psychiatry and child psychiatry

I was introduced to the idea of human activity affecting the health of our planet very early in life. Growing up in Hawaii, water was a precious commodity, and we visited the Honolulu water supply where we learned how fragile the balance was in protecting the freshwater resources deep in the Islands from encroachment by the sea. We learned to feel compassion for the Earth herself rather than to take her for granted.

As a result, care for the Islands when I was a child, and now the planet, has been a sacred duty I have felt most of my life.

Living in Bellingham, I consider us to be at “ground zero” in the battle to reverse economic and political forces that will only lead to more damage to the planet and to all beings who live here. As soon as it became known that there was a move toward building a port for the transport of Wyoming coal to China near us, I became very involved in efforts to impede this. I have approached this effort with optimism because of our success locally in retaining a riparian forest of 100 acres within the Bellingham city limits, resisting multiple efforts to develop it and destroy wetlands and fish habitat. Our success in this effort helps me to know that we can make a difference.

I believe the unique perspective stemming from our role as physicians creates for us a platform for speaking to the concerns regarding climate change more from a moral, ethical, and constructive perspective then would be true for other entities. Our only agenda is to advocate for health and the recognition of the interconnectedness of all living beings, including Earth herself. This gives us moral suasion in considering our futures. What we have to say speaks to others at a very personal, intuitive level and engages with their own moral and ethical capacities.

Having no doubt that climate change is already occurring and will continue even if we make a concerted effort to reduce our impact on planetary health, this work is critical for the well-being of our children, grandchildren, and yet to be born generations. We have a duty to them to consider how we will leave this planet which we have "borrowed from them". If we do not pick up this challenge we will not only fail them but also ourselves and we will have allowed our spirits to wither.

As physicians we make efforts to encourage the health of others. This is a project of love and commitment that we shoulder every day. We have skills, perspective, and truth on our side and we will prevail.

If I am not for me, who will be?
If I am not for you, what am I?
If not now, when?
Ua Mau Ke Ea O Ka Aina I Ka Pono

The Life of the Land is Perpetuated in Righteousness