GEGM – HEALTHY PLANET - HEALTHY PEOPLE

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Addressing climate change by linking planetary and human health

The Healthy Planet - Healthy People foundation was created in 2020 to add the voices of medical professionals to the debate on climate change. Climate change is the biggest threat to human and planetary health in the 21st century. Why is there so little effective action to address it?

One reason is that the narrative of homeless polar bears, atmospheric chemistry and future sea-level rises is psychologically distancing. Healthy Planet - Healthy People focuses on a topic most people care about: their own health and the health of their families. Climate change is already directly affecting human health in many ways: through heatwaves, air pollution, emerging infectious diseases and allergies. It will also endanger our food safety and water supply and lead to major conflicts and massive migration.

Covid-19 has shown that one virus jumping from an animal to a human being can cause enormous damage. Climate change is a much bigger threat. There will never be a vaccine or 'herd immunity' to a hothouse earth. Planetary health must become our first priority.

Addressing climate change from a health perspective has three distinct advantages. First, it moves an abstract scientific problem into the centre of people's everyday lives. Second, we can talk about the immediate and individual benefits. Changing to a plant-based diet, for example, is equally beneficial for one's personal health and in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Third, the concept of 'one health' integrates the wellbeing of ecosystems, animals and humans.

Our new foundation builds on the skills and networks of the founder Eckart von Hirschhausen. As a medical doctor, he is known throughout Germany for his unique way of communicating about health on primetime public television, in best-selling books and in stand-up comedy shows. In

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collaboration with the medical consultancy Die Brückenköpfe (The Bridge-heads) and drawing on ten years of experience of von Hirschhausen's other foundation Humor Hilft Heilen (Humour Helps Healing), we should be able to quickly create a meaningful impact.

The overall goal is to use the natural authority of doctors, nurses and other health professionals to reach new target groups. We need to move away from scientific language to a more accessible, even humorous, motivational style. Everyone needs to understand that a positive contribution is possible and required on the individual as well as the political level.

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Recommendations for foundations

- Check if your goals are connected directly or indirectly to human and planetary health. The Healthy Planet – Healthy People approach can be applied to many other activities.

- Invest in professional communication, political networking and online visibility. The best way to move others is with positive narratives and best practices. We need to make sustainability the new 'normal'. Political advocacy is the biggest lever for change.

- Support research and action in the underfunded field of mental health. Climate change, war and migration can trigger helplessness, trauma and depression in adults and children alike. It's hard for people working on complex global problems to avoid burnout.