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Press release

Health Care Can Help Lead the Fight Against Climate Change

Geneva-Washington DC, 26 May 2009—Climate change not only poses serious threats to human health, but the health-sector can play a leadership role in reducing the magnitude and consequences of global warming by getting its own house in order. That is the message of a discussion paper just issued by the World Health Organization and Health Care Without Harm.

“By reducing its climate footprint and moving toward carbon neutrality, the health sector can demonstrate the path forward in this age of global warming, thereby playing a leadership role in advocating for a healthy and sustainable future,” commented Maria Neira, Director of WHO’s Department of Public Health and Environment.

Released earlier this month at the World Health Assembly, a gathering of Ministers of Health from every nation, the discussion paper presents examples from around the world of hospitals taking measures to reduce their climate footprint. It outlines seven steps health care systems can take to move toward climate friendly health care. And it identifies a series of opportunities for action at the global, national and local levels.

“This paper begins to define a framework for analyzing and addressing the health sector’s climate footprint,” said Josh Karliner, International Coordinator for Health Care Without Harm, one of the report’s authors. “HCWH and its NGO partners, including the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) in Europe, will be using it as the basis for discussion and consultation with health care professionals, hospitals and health systems around the world in order to build a global network that can advocate for climate friendly health care.”

The discussion paper argues that many of the steps hospitals and health care systems can take to reduce their impact on the world’s climate can also save money and improve the health of the population and the quality of care they deliver. It also points out that “urgent action from all sectors of society is necessary to mitigate the impacts of climate change.”

“With the world’s governments set to establish a new agreement for addressing climate change in Copenhagen this December, it is essential that Europe’s health sector speaks out and puts pressure on the EU and our governments to advocate for a strong stance that addresses the most serious environmental health issue that the world faces today,” said Dr Pendo Maro, Joint Senior Climate Change and Energy Advisor, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) and Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL).

The paper is available for download at www.noharm.org or www.env-health.org

Health Care Without Harm is a global network of more than 440 organizations in 52 countries working to transform the health care sector so it is no longer a source of harm to people and the environment.

The Health and Environment Alliance aims to raise awareness of how environmental protection improves health. It brings together more than 50 organizations working at the European level. Website: www.env-health.org

The World Health Organization is the international agency within the United Nations system responsible for health.

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