

Ask EcoGirl

By Patricia Dines

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Greening Medicine

Dear EcoGirl: Thank you for your recent column, "Eco-Remedies for Our Health Care Crisis." Could you say more about the specific ways that we can use environmental knowledge to help care for people and the planet?
Signed, A Motivated Healer

Dear Motivated Healer: Thanks for your great question!

Three Key Eco-Objectives

Amidst all the fiery debates about who should pay for health care costs, a more essential question can get lost: How to trim costs (and heartache) by reducing the rates of disease. A vital but often overlooked way to accomplish that goal is for all of us to embrace and prioritize these three key eco-objectives:

1) Drastically reduce our individual and shared exposure to toxics and pollutants. Compelling evidence demonstrates that millions of people annually are being made seriously ill from these materials. We need to "just say no" to involuntary poisoning.

2) Emphasize an eco-healthy diet, both in our lives and our hospitals (please!). We receive the highest nutrition and lowest toxicity by eating food that's fresh, whole, organic, and low on the food chain. Organic agriculture also proves that we can grow our food without poisoning our air and water.

3) Integrate earth-friendly traditional healing as an equal partner with modern medicine. Traditional modalities treat the body and earth gently, reducing the negative impacts on both. These approaches are often better at identifying and adjusting health imbalances early, when they're easier, cheaper, and less traumatic to treat.

Assess Your Priorities

To identify your next desired actions in each of the above areas, ask yourself:

1) "How much do I know about the problems and solutions in each arena?"

2) "How much have I implemented the related solutions in my personal and professional life?", and

3) "How much am I supporting community-level action in these arenas?"

As you consider your answers, notice the issues to which you feel especially drawn. This will help you choose actions most connected to your passions and priorities. Many resources exist to help you find out more, including my past columns at www.askecogirl.info.

Pharms in the Water

Both patients and health professionals can reduce medicine's eco-impacts by disposing of pharmaceuticals properly and using them only when necessary.

While pharmaceuticals can help treat disease, they can also bring negative side effects to patients, and harm wildlife and water supplies through disposal and excretion. Most sewage and water treatment facilities aren't designed to remove these materials.

Actions you can take:

- **Dispose of leftover pharmaceuticals responsibly**, not in the trash or drain. Local dropoff information is at www.scwasafemeds.org or call 547-1900. Or bring them to the Household Toxics Facility (www.recyclenow.org, 565-3375).

- **Minimize your pharmaceutical intake.** If you're prescribed a new drug, consider getting a second opinion. Buy drugs in small quantities to limit leftovers. Don't pressure your doctor for medications they're not recommending.

- **Doctors can help by prescribing only the amount needed** and learning which drugs have the highest ecotoxicity.

- **Explore non-pharmaceutical approaches** to nurturing your health

and addressing problems. Discuss options (such as herbs, acupuncture, and lifestyle changes) with a health care professional experienced with these options. Traditional remedies are often cheaper, more effective, and lower in risk than more drastic measures later on.

For more information about reducing pharmaceutical waste, see www.epa.gov/ppcp and the Teleosis Institute's Green Pharmacy Program (www.teleosis.org, (510) 558-7285).

Greening Operations

Health professionals can also help protect both the earth and our health by **avoiding mercury medical devices and not burning waste**. This prevents dispersal of toxic mercury, lead, and dioxin into our shared air, water, and food.

Operations staff can make medical facilities healthier for both patients and workers by **avoiding toxic cleaners and pesticides, building and remodeling with non-toxic and eco-materials, and serving fresh nutritious organic food** instead of depleted mainstream food.

For more about greening medicine, check out Health Care Without Harm (www.noharm.org).

Ask EcoGirl is written by Patricia Dines, Author of The Organic Guides, and Editor and Lead Writer for The Next STEP newsletter. Email your questions about going green to <EcoGirl@AskEcoGirl.info> for possible inclusion in future columns. Also see "Ask EcoGirl" on Facebook! And contact EcoGirl for information about carrying this syndicated column in your periodical. "EcoGirl: Encouraging the eco-hero in everyone."

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