

Taking an Environmental Health History

Leyla Erk McCurdy, MPhil
National Environmental Education Foundation

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The Need

“Because many environmental diseases either manifest common medical problems or have nonspecific symptoms, an exposure history is vital for correct diagnosis. By taking a thorough exposure history, the primary care clinician can play an important role in detecting, treating, and preventing disease caused due to toxic exposure.”

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry. United States Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service. Obtaining an exposure history. Atlanta, Georgia. *Am Fam Physician*. 1993 Sep 1;48(3):483-91.

The Need

Physician Assistant Education Association and several other medical, nursing, and public health organizations have endorsed the *Health Professionals and Environmental Health Education Position Statement*, which calls for incorporating the ability to elicit an environmental exposure history into health professionals' education.

Rogers B. Environmental health hazards and health care professional education. *AAOHN J*. 2004; 52(4):154-155. Position Statement: Health Professionals and Environmental Health Education.

<http://www.neefusa.org/pdf/PositionStatement.pdf>

The Reality

Few health care providers are trained in environmental history taking

- Half of practicing pediatricians surveyed had seen a patient with health issues related to environmental exposure
- Half agreed environmental history taking was useful in identifying potentially hazardous exposures and in helping prevent exposures
- Fewer than one-fifth were trained in taking an environmental health history

Kilpatrick N, Frumkin H, Trowbridge J, Escoffery C, Geller R, Rubin I, et al. 2002. The environmental history in pediatric practice: a study of pediatricians' attitudes, beliefs, and practices. *Environ Health Perspect.* 110: 823-827.

The Reality

Most practitioners

- Do not routinely ask questions on pesticide exposures
- Do not feel prepared to handle pesticide issues
- Tend not to inquire about issues with which they are not comfortable

Balbus, JM, Harvey, CE, McCurdy, LE. 2006. 'Educational Needs Assessment for Pediatric Health Providers on Pesticide Toxicity', *Journal of Agromedicine*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 27-38.

Pediatric Environmental History Initiative

- Multiyear initiative to integrate history taking into clinical practice
- Provides tools and resources needed to take environmental histories
- Developed by experts
- Built on current scientific literature and existing tools

<http://www.neefusa.org/health/PEHI/index.htm>

Environmental Management of Pediatric Asthma: Guidelines for Health Care Providers



Released by the National Environmental Education Foundation in August 2005

<http://www.neefusa.org/health/asthma/index.htm>

Environmental History Form



Additional Resources

Power Point Presentations on:

- Environmental Health History for Pediatrics
- Taking and Environmental History to Address Children's Unique Vulnerabilities to Environmental Health Risks
- Environmental Management of Pediatric Asthma
- Environmental Tobacco Smoke
- Exposure to Ultraviolet Light
- National Pesticide Practice Skills Guidelines for Medical & Nursing Practice
- Lead and Mercury

<http://www.neefusa.org/health/champions/cehresources.htm>

Additional Resources

NEEF provides lists of and links to other selected resources:

- Organizations
- General Environmental Health Resources
- Resources on Specific Topics
 - Asthma
 - Tobacco Smoke
 - Lead
 - Mercury
 - Pesticides
 - Ultraviolet Light
- Environmental Health Listservs
- Contact information for Environmental Health Specialty Units

http://www.neefusa.org/pdf/Other_ResourcesforHCP.pdf

For More Information

Leyla Erk McCurdy

Senior Director, Health & Environment
National Environmental Education Foundation
(NEEF)
4301 Connecticut Ave., Suite 160
Washington DC, 20008
Phone: 202-261-6488
Fax: 202-261-6464
Email: mccurdy@neefusa.org

www.neefusa.org
