

## Our Doctor Writes - June 2009

The lancet this week publishes a sentinel piece on the effects of climate change on health. The front page states that climate change is the biggest threat to health in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The concerns about climate change are often dismissed as being shrouded by a bunch of eco-warriors who don't understand the science. This couldn't be further from the truth. The lancet is one of a handful of world renowned medical journals with the highest levels of scientific rigour. The science and medical conclusions are highly dependable. They are staggering to say the very least. The impact on health from changing weather systems will come from many directions. There are projections of changing patterns of disease such as malaria. Rising temperatures have a direct impact on morbidity and mortality as they had in France in 2003 with an estimated 3500 extra deaths attributed directly to a rise in seasonal temperatures. The most dramatic impacts on health may well come from mankind's hostile reaction to rapid change with mass migration and resource wars contributing to the burden of ill health.

In December the world has another chance to make a difference to the effects of human activity on carbon use and climate change. Health is an important political agenda and we are in the process of trying to influence the decisions taken in Denmark. On a personal level many of the things that we can do with our own health have direct benefits for us now and will decrease carbon use and help to mitigate the ravaging effects on the health of our children and grandchildren. Think about walking or cycling if it is a reasonable option. If you live in the village and do a school run then do it on foot or on bike. Eating red meat has a massive effect on carbon production. It's not necessarily about becoming wholly vegetarian but cutting back consumption will help enormously. A valid recent calculation estimated that if we were all to have a meat free day a week then this would be equivalent to taking 5 million cars off the road. Eating less ruminant red meat is good for you now. It decreases the incidence of heart disease and colon cancer. Amongst you there are those with national and international contacts. If you are one of them use these contacts and be a lever.

Previously I've written about community training for basic life support and the use of a community defibrillator. I think we all need to take our hats off to Shalbourne! They have managed to train approaching 20% of the community and are well on the way to purchasing an automatic defibrillator that will be available and accessible for all those who have been trained. This really throws the gauntlet down for others who may have been thinking about a project like this. It just shows you that it can be done.

Following a recent article I was thrilled that the Bedwyn Link team have begun to seriously look at whether they are able to use their current infrastructure to offer extra help over and above transport to local people in need. If you want to know more about it there is a short report from the Bedwyn Link AGM in this month Bedwyn magazine. If you want to know more about setting up a similar scheme in another village please let me know and I will put you in touch with the Bedwyn group for help and advice.

Best wishes,

Dr Tim Ballard