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Environmental Factor
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Environmental medicine shows promise for reducing chronic disease

By Robin Mackar

At a May 9 seminar, a trio of researchers highlighted how environmental medicine can help reduce leading health problems, including diabetes, obesity, and other chronic diseases.



NIEHS and National Toxicology Program (NTP) Director Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., left, introduced Nagy at the seminar on environmental medicine. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

"Obesity, Electrosensitivity, Mycotoxicosis, and the Clinical Practice of Medicine," hosted by the NIEHS Office of the Director, focused on the role of chemicals, mold, food, electromagnetic energy, and other environmental factors in making people sick, and how removing triggers from a person's environment can improve health. This patient-centered, cause-oriented model for diagnosing, treating, and preventing chronic diseases is known as environmental medicine.

Lisa Nagy, M.D. (http://www.vineyardpersonalizedmedicine.com/Vineyard_Personalized_Medicine/Welcome_to_Vineyard_Personalized_Medicine.html), director of the Environmental Health Center of Martha's Vineyard, shared her personal story of surviving multiple chemical sensitivities and discussed her work teaching, practicing, and advocating for environmental medicine. Magda Havas, Ph.D. (http://www.magdahavas.com/), from Trent University in Ontario, and William Meggs, M.D., Ph.D. (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-dhs/ecuem/fac/meggsw.cfm), from East Carolina University, presented specific examples from their own practices.



Meggs said diet can help reduce inflammation and risk of related diseases. He has even co-authored a cookbook (http://www.ecu.edu/cs-admin/news/cookbook14.cfm) on the topic. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

Environmental triggers to chronic diseases

"I practice emergency medicine and get a ringside seat to what is really going on in the medical world," Meggs said in the first presentation. He noted that increases in suicide attempts, diabetes, and obesity rates were health problems that may be related to environmental factors.

Meggs said that one-third of the U.S. population is obese, and something needs to be done to address this significant public health threat. He indicated that one way to accomplish this would be to limit exposure to environmental chemicals.

Discussing the differences between the two approaches he practices — conventional and environmental medicine — Meggs said both have value, but an environmental approach, in which the focus is on taking away things that are shown to cause harm, may be more beneficial for certain health concerns. Factors besides chemicals, such as nutrition and genetics, also play a role, he said.

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