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**N.C. Health Professionals Prescribe Fossil Fuel Divestment for Medical Institutions  
Practitioners have “moral responsibility not to profit from activities that do harm”**

Raleigh, NC -- Climate change has been implicated in a number of public health concerns, including more incidents of heat-related illness and injuries and displacement due to severe weather, Dr. Jeffrey Walden, an assistant professor at UNC School of Medicine, and Laura Wenzel, manager of Medical Advocates for Healthy Air, write in the current issue of the *North Carolina Medical Journal*.

Since the carbon pollution that causes climate change comes primarily from burning fossil fuels, Walden and Wenzel advocate for medical institutions to divest from fossil fuels.

“As medical professionals, we have a moral responsibility not to profit from activities that do harm,” Walden said. “Hospitals and universities divested from tobacco in the 1980s and 1990s, and we should be doing the same thing with fossil fuels today.”

Large organizations like hospitals maintain investment portfolios that usually contain stock from a wide variety of companies. Organizations can direct the portfolio managers to divest from owning stock in companies that are in industries, or are based in countries, that run counter to their values.

The British Medical Association voted to divest from fossil fuels last year, and more than 100 universities, organizations and municipalities have committed to divesting from fossil fuels, among them Brevard College and Warren Wilson College in North Carolina, the Canadian Medical Association and the city of Madison, Wisconsin, according to Fossil Free, a project of 350.org.

Walden and Wenzel suggest that focusing on the health benefits of fossil fuel reduction provides an opportunity to move the conversation away from climate change.

“We have been focusing on the environmental issues that climate change brings, and those are kind of overwhelming and people can be reluctant to talk about them,” Walden said. “But if we talk about how reducing fossil fuels improves the health of you and your children, it becomes a manageable issue.”

Fossil fuel combustion produces ozone precursors and toxic particles that exacerbate conditions like asthma and cardiac problems. “If we all drove vehicles powered with clean renewable electricity or used public transportation, my patients would breathe healthier air when they left the clinic,” Walden said.

“Clean air policy has proven health benefits,” Wenzel said. “At our upcoming NC BREATHE conference in Charlotte, we’ll hear from Dr. Julia Krauchenka at Duke University who has found reductions in deaths from heart attack and stroke following air pollution reductions that resulted from the 2002 Clean Smokestacks Act. We were able to clean our air, improve public health and grow our economy at the same time. With the new energy technologies and resources that we have now, there is no reason why we shouldn’t transition away from fossil fuels, starting with our investment portfolios.”

The letter in the N.C. Medical Journal is available at  
<http://www.ncmedicaljournal.com/content/77/2/146.full.pdf>

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*Medical Advocates for Healthy Air is a program of Clean Air Carolina. Clean Air Carolina is a nonprofit organization based in Charlotte, North Carolina with a satellite office in the Triangle. Our mission is to ensure cleaner air quality for all North Carolinians through education and advocacy and by working with our partners to reduce sources of pollution.*