



AUSTRALIA

What are the most significant global issues facing us today?

We have reached a turning point in evolution. Humanity has finally come up against the constraints of a limited planet, and rampant consumerism and self-interest are fueling wealth inequality, financial instability, climate change, ozone depletion, deforestation, species extinction, environmental toxicity and an epidemic of lifestyle related chronic diseases in an aging and ever increasing human population.

We live in a world where one third of all people are starving, one third are well fed, one third are overfed, and everyday 25,000 people (mainly children) die from malnutrition-related disease while 75,000 people die from the results of over consumption. In addition to being over exposed to sugar, fat, salt, alcohol and tobacco, the entire human population is being exposed to a toxic cocktail of industrial chemicals contributing to a growing shortage of clean air, water, and soil. There are currently over 120,000 toxic chemicals produced commercially, and significant catastrophic accidents have already exposed vast human populations to toxic materials, with accidents occurring in every stage of the production process including extraction (BP), transport (Exxon Valdez), manufacture (Bhopal), use (Chernobyl and Fukushima) and disposal (Love Canal).

The *United States Centre for Disease Control's NHANES* study is the world's most comprehensive environmental chemical biomonitoring study and the most recent report found chemicals such as PBDEs and BPA in nearly all participants tested. This study also confirmed previous reports suggesting that children bear the brunt of a toxic legacy, with children being found to be more toxic than adolescents, who are in turn more toxic than adults. We now know that childhood exposure begins in utero with multiple carcinogenic and endocrine-disrupting chemicals being found in umbilical cord blood, and this exposure extends after birth via toxins present in breastmilk, food, air, water, indoor environments, hard and soft furnishings, toys, personal products and consumer goods. Further recent studies suggest that in utero and childhood exposure to environmental toxins can have adverse long-term health effects including transgenerational effects that contribute to the global epidemic of obesity, diabetes, depression, ADHD, cancer and dementia.

While chemicals can be toxic, they can also be extremely profitable and addictive, and this has allowed a handful of big oil, agriculture, pharma and food companies to control the majority of the world's energy, food, health and security, and to create a global society that is addicted to cheap, readily available fossil fuel. Control of the media has further fostered a culture of rampant consumerism and conspicuous consumption with a focus on economic growth at the expense of the environment and quality of life.

Our greatest challenge now is to try and break our addiction to industrial chemicals and detoxify our world.

What do you see as the main innovations happening around the world, those which are game changing and/or disruptive?

Whatever happens, it is almost certain that information technology will shape the future. The act of living in the modern world creates personal information trails throughout our life and the internet is increasingly causing us to participate in online environments. Innovations in medical diagnostics, nanotechnology, biomonitoring, mobile apps and online medical records now permit an unprecedented array of personal and other information to become immediately available to assist in making decisions about our well-being and to inform our choice of products and services. The development of cooperative social networks, electronic health records, online gaming and education, conversational agents, and telephonic wellness-coaching and telemedicine also promises to transform and further globalize the spa and wellness industry, while making it more locally relevant and accessible. There is a growing realization that everything

is interconnected, that individual actions have planetary consequences, and that if we are to survive we must drastically change how we live, and adopt conscious consumption patterns that change corporate behavior. This realization is being fostered through online environments that facilitate alignment across networks and sectors. Small local grass-root movements, that have been battling it out for decades on their own, now have the tools to congregate online with other similar movements and enlist the support of academic, corporate and government interests to create even more holistic and integrated networks with a global outlook. This is leading to a global sharing of research, knowledge and expertise that transcends corporate interests and creates wellness environments and systems that foster Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability (LOHAS), local solutions for currency exchange, the provision of Seasonal, Local, Organic, Whole (SLOW) food, transition towns, permaculture, environmental conservation and remediation, sustainable lifestyles, natural medicine and holistic health.

What do you see as the main innovations in the spa/wellness industry (existing and future)?

I see the GSWS as a major innovation that provides a global focus and meeting place for thought leaders from different industry sectors to converge. The GSWS also creates a platform for disseminating new research on the global spa economy and provides access to existing research through initiatives such as spaevideance.com. I see future innovations including individualized wellness interventions and services that provide lifelong continuity of care across multiple locations and service providers. I also see the emergence of the first 'evidence-based wellness programs' that document the ability of wellness environments and interventions to produce measurable outcomes in terms of health, wellbeing, toxin exposure, environmental impact and cost. Such evidence will become available through the aggregation of new data, which is becoming available through inexpensive and widely available new tools for monitoring health and toxin exposure, along with partnerships between the academic, corporate, government and non-government sectors. Such partnerships are already forming; for example, the Australian Government is in the process of creating six, industry-backed Partnership Centers for Better Health and is providing grants of \$2.5 million/year for five years to consortiums of academic, corporate and non-government partners. Many similar initiatives can be found around the globe.

What do you see as the greatest opportunities/challenges for the global spa and wellness industry?

The greatest challenge is to move from a consciousness based on fear and separation to a consciousness based on love and connection. Never before have humans been able to be 'in touch' with so many others, yet while mobile devices can keep us in touch with the world we seem to be out of touch with the environment and each other and have become deprived of our need for physical touch. Through the provision of massage, the spa and wellness industry builds on ancient wisdom and tradition to place a direct value on human connection and serves to reconnect us with our natural environment and ourselves. There is also a significant opportunity for the spa and wellness industry to develop new commercial opportunities and environments and to pioneer detoxification programs including community, preconception, pregnancy, infant and child based programs. What are some practical ways for businesses to create a climate for creativity and innovation? Create learning environments where making mistakes is encouraged and celebrated and where people with different skill sets come together to have fun, play with ideas and create new opportunities. Expand traditional discipline boundaries and align with community, government and academic interests and initiatives. Use ecological principles to connect people with nature and create shared value.

SUBMITTED BY

Professor Marc Cohen

Program Leader, Online Master of Wellness Program

RMIT University

Australia

E: marc.cohen@rmit.edu.au W: www.rmit.edu.au/wellness