



## Summary

### **The Complexities of Environmental Medicine**

**Jennifer Armstrong, MD**

Founder and Medical Director at the Ottawa Environmental Health Clinic

Dr. Jennifer Armstrong's presentation offered a deeply personal and professional account of environmental medicine, shaped by over two decades of experience treating chemically sensitive patients. As the founder of the Environmental Health Clinic in Ottawa, she has worked with more than 3,000 patients since 1997, offering an integrative, chemical-free clinical environment. Her talk underscored the need for a paradigm shift in how medicine understands, diagnoses, and treats complex chronic illnesses like Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS), which she argued are best addressed through environmental medicine's holistic, patient-centered lens.

Dr. Armstrong explained that environmental medicine approaches illness by looking for underlying causes rather than merely treating symptoms with pharmaceuticals. This model challenges the conventional view that each symptom warrants a separate drug. Instead, it recognizes that a range of seemingly unrelated symptoms—such as fatigue, muscle cramps, or brain fog—may stem from a single or a few environmental triggers, including chemical exposures, food sensitivities, or nutrient deficiencies. If these root causes are identified and eliminated, many patients experience dramatic improvement or complete remission. She highlighted the importance of teamwork between doctor and patient, and the need for physicians to shed ego-driven approaches that assume they must always have immediate answers.

She illustrated her points with case studies and long-term trends observed at her clinic. Many of her patients recovered after a few years and no longer needed ongoing support, particularly those diagnosed early. Others, especially those diagnosed later in life, remained more sensitive and required longer-term care. Dr. Armstrong also pointed to the substantial economic implications of her practice, noting that reducing reliance on pharmaceuticals and promoting environmental interventions could significantly lower healthcare costs.



A key part of Dr. Armstrong's presentation was her discussion of Dr. Theron Randolph's work, considered foundational in environmental medicine. She described how Dr. Randolph's research, supported by patient histories, revealed patterns of chemical sensitivity and dysfunction, leading to a now widely accepted theoretical model. Using diagrams derived from his work, Dr. Armstrong explained how repeated chemical exposures over time push the body from adaptive phases into states of dysfunction and eventual end-organ failure. This model, she said, aligns with what she has seen in clinical practice and offers a compelling explanation for how chronic illness develops in sensitive individuals.

She also touched on the social and gendered dimensions of MCS, noting that women often face skepticism or dismissal from healthcare providers. Some patients were able to recover relatively quickly due to a supportive workplace, and a clean, low-pollutant home Environment. Dr. Armstrong emphasized the difference that belief and structural support can make in patient outcomes.

In her concluding remarks, Dr. Armstrong called for a broader cultural and institutional change. She advocated for environmental health education to begin in high school rather than waiting until medical school, by which time many one's attitudes and assumptions are already formed. She emphasized the importance of stronger regulations on chemicals, and transparent labelling. She aligned her approach with the principles of personalized precision medicine, noting that environmental physicians are already applying such methods to tailor patient-specific interventions based on individual toxic exposures and physiological needs.

Ultimately Dr. Armstrong's presentation served as both a clinical roadmap and a call to action, inviting medical professionals, educators, and policymakers to embrace a model of care that listens to patients, honours biological individuality, and places environmental determinants of health at the center of medical practice.