

Let's get moving

It's not hard to come across a news headline highlighting yet another health problem that could be prevented, reduced, or treated by increasing physical activity. A physically active lifestyle not only prevents cardiovascular disease but also substantially increases overall life expectancy. (An excellent article on this topic appears in the 14 March 2006 issue of the *CMAJ*.) This means we all stand a better chance of living a longer and healthier life when we exercise on a regular basis.

As active as we think?

In 2004, the BC Nutrition Survey found that although 80% of adults in British Columbia believed they were active enough for good health, a significant proportion of BC adults do no strenuous (61%) or moderate (36%) exercise during their leisure time. Therefore, many British Columbians fall short of achieving 30 minutes of moderate activity most (at least 5) days of the week, which is the current standard recommendation for Canadian adults. The survey also revealed that leisure time exercise rates decrease after age 30 but remain stable thereafter in both men and women.

In May 2005, the Heart and Stroke Foundation (HSF) released its report card on physical activity in children. The report gave Canada a D grade when it comes to keeping kids physically active. The HSF 2006 annual report on the health of Canadians looked at the wave of baby boomers turning 60 and suggested that this could be the first generation to turn back the clock and experience a decline in quality of life. Compared to rates 10 years ago, the obesity rates in boomers have soared by nearly 60%, and a whopping 52% are inactive (compared to 43% a decade ago).

The 2004 annual report of the provincial health officer looked at the impact of diabetes on the health and well-being of British Columbians. Currently 5.2% of people living in BC have been diagnosed with diabetes and this is predicted to double in the next 10 years if rates continue to increase at their current level. Increasing the physical activity of British Columbians would help prevent this. Overwhelming evidence increasingly makes two things clear: first, that regular physical activity is important for the prevention of many chronic conditions, and second, that British Columbians are not as active as they think they are.

How can we increase our own physical activity?

Our committee has organized the Docs-on-the-Run online training program. BC doctors can become more physically active through the walk, walk-to-run, or run 10K faster program. This successful and safe training program has been used to help thousands of previously inactive British Columbians train for the Vancouver Sun Run. There are still a few Docs-on-the-Run high-quality T-shirts available from SportMedBC for \$25. For those who missed out on the training, look for opportunities in your local community to become more active. Under the province's Act Now! BC umbrella, the Active Communities program is working to help each community in BC provide initiatives to increase physical activity among the local population.

How can docs promote patients' physical activity?

The BCMA is partnering with the BC Recreation and Parks Association on a pilot project that involves physicians

promoting physical activity by giving out pedometers to patients who are not optimally active and referring them to action sites in their communities to receive support in becoming more physically active. This project will begin in Abbotsford and Penticton in spring 2006. Our goal is to document at least a 20% increase in physical activity levels among participants. Once the results are available, they will be disseminated to members and a proposal will be made to take this project throughout the province.

On 23 March 2005, the health minister announced that \$30 million in new funding will be directed to the BC Healthy Living Alliance and Legacies 2010 specifically for promoting physical activity, healthy eating, and smoking reduction. It is our hope that some of this funding will allow the pedometer project to go forward.

This year will see further promotion of the "eat well, play well, stay well" messages that were developed last year through the BCMA project on childhood obesity. There is still opportunity for you to become a designated speaker for this program in your community. For information contact Ms Suzette Alvarez at the BCMA at salvarez@bcma.bc.ca.

There is no doubt that many physicians are physically active. Our committee hopes to survey BCMA members on their own levels of physical activity. To those who are and continue to be physically active on a regular basis, we congratulate you and encourage you to help your colleagues become more active.

Let's take the lead by becoming physically active ourselves and working in our communities to promote physical activity. Let's get moving.

—Ron Wilson, MD, Chair,
Athletics and Recreation Committee