

## 50 years and going strong

**H**ere are some of the issues and solutions to health care problems the Council on Health Promotion (COHP) has developed over the past 50 years: a dementia strategy, air and water quality legislation, mandatory infant car seats, seniors' health issues, healthy living initiatives, childhood obesity measurement. COHP doesn't just recommend; it takes action, raising awareness, initiating strategies, and influencing legislation.

In 1957 COHP was formed to increase the BCMA's participation in promoting community and public health. Dr Russell Palmer, a leader in the provincial medical community, was its first chair. At that time, COHP was immersed in the health issues of the day, which included birth control, women's choice, and affordable prescription drugs.

Today, although the health climate is very different, COHP is still at the forefront of health promotion in this province.

### Recent successes

For many years BC was the only province that didn't have a coordinated plan to care for dementia patients. Under the leadership of Dr Duncan Robertson, chair of the Geriatric and Palliative Care Committee, COHP proposed a comprehensive dementia strategy that government adopted in 2005.

Childhood obesity is of considerable concern, not only because of the adverse health effects to children, but also because of the high cost to our healthcare system. If this situation continues unabated, childhood obesity will cost the province—all of us—about \$1 billion in less than 10 years. The good news is that there's money being spent to address this problem.

But the challenge is to determine how to best allocate the money and to measure its effect. Here are our three main actions in this area:

- After much research, COHP developed the Child and Youth Growth Index. Its intent is to measure, each year, the BMI of every school child in the province. We will then know which regions have the biggest obesity problems, where to start implementing programs, and, most importantly, how well the interventions are working. Last year the Index was the number one recommendation of the Select Standing Committee on Health. COHP is currently working with many different organizations to encourage the provincial government to turn this recommendation into an active program.
- Our "Eat Well, Play Well, Stay Well," program was designed to encourage families to eat a balanced diet, exercise regularly, and do these things together as a family. COHP attracted the participation of about 50 doctors from around the province to deliver an informative and practical presentation to parents.
- To get children thinking about healthy living, COHP created a fun contest to have children submit their favorite healthy recipe or a photo of themselves participating in their favorite physical activity. The Council was thrilled to receive more than 400 entries from all corners of the province. A recipe winner and a photo winner each received a gift certificate toward the purchase of sports equipment.

### The future

Aboriginal health is an area where physicians' expertise is urgently needed. COHP will be developing new and

practical ways to make a positive impact in the Aboriginal community.

The news is full of stories about the health of the environment. We should all be concerned about how the changing environment will affect our health. COHP will be addressing the effects that climate change will have on health and disease patterns in BC.

In the immediate future, the Council will be concentrating its efforts on banning cell phone use while driving. No doubt we all have seen erratic driving or near misses where the driver was busy talking on the phone instead of paying attention to the road. As traffic increases and cell phones become more prevalent, the crash rate related to cell phone use will inevitably rise. COHP will be getting the message out to government and our communities.

Health promotion is an integral part of health care. It is an area in which physicians are very well placed to provide leadership, expertise and encouragement, not only to government and other agencies, but to all British Columbians. By the very nature of our jobs, we often develop close relationships with our patients and hold prominent positions in our communities. Therefore, we need to lead by example when it comes to eating properly, exercising, and being environmentally responsible.

The next 50 years will present many more health opportunities and challenges. COHP will continue to be the public health voice of the BCMA and to promote healthy living to British Columbians and the provincial government.

For more detailed information on COHP's past and present projects, please log in to the BCMA web site at [www.bcma.org](http://www.bcma.org).

—Bill Mackie, MD  
Chair, COHP