

Gold medal rant

“Do those skin suits come in extra large?”
“Why do you ask?”
“Duh, because I drink too much beer.”
“No, I mean why do you want one?”
“Well, I want to rent one.”
“You can’t rent a bobsled.”
“Why not, my taxes helped pay for this thing and my wife, son, and daughter would like a go. My wife likes to swim but we don’t have a local pool, and my kids are both in hockey but can’t get ice time. One of the so-called legacies of these Olympics is the great facilities left behind—so give me four of those little helmets and suits and get out of our way or I’ll sit on you.”

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I was recently in an interior BC town and was amazed by their local sport facility, which included a 50-metre swimming pool, a large gym, indoor track, gymnastics area, weight and aerobic rooms, and more. Estimates peg the total cost of hosting the 2010 Winter Olympics at around \$1.76 billion. If our goal is to encourage the population to be active, shouldn’t we have skipped the Olympics and build facilities such as the one I visited?

Don’t get me wrong. I love sport and enjoy keeping active and challenging myself. I just don’t think money spent on the Olympics is benefiting the health of our population. I have heard the many arguments for hosting such an event:

- The Olympics help get your name on the tourism map. Come on, who hasn’t heard of Whistler?
- The Olympics encourage the population to get healthier—the so-called trickle-down effect. If that’s the case, why does the medal rich United States have one of the unhealthiest populations?
- The Olympics leave a legacy of sport facilities that the population can use. I agree that cross-country ski trails and ski runs can be used, but I’m guessing not many people are going to take up ski jumping, luge, or skeleton.
- The Olympics make money. Really? If so, for whom?

Does anyone really care if Canada gets 30, 20, 10 or even zero medals? National-level athletes often complain of chronic underfunding compared with other countries. How can they compete with their better-funded peers? The truth is they can’t, but who guaranteed that the taxpayer will fund a life dedicated to sliding down the ice really fast? It really burns me to think that my taxes went to sending some guy and his horse to Beijing, China, to

jump over fences (I didn’t want to only pick on the Winter Olympics and I apologize to all you equestrian fans—this is the first stupid sport that came to mind).

Other countries can have their medals while we get healthy and live longer, happier, and less stressful lives.

As physicians we are proponents of healthy lifestyles and should be encouraging our patients to get active. How about we lobby our municipal, provincial, and federal governments to scrap elitist events like the Olympics and instead focus on building and running local facilities—pools, gyms, ice rinks, running tracks, cross-country trails, lighted walking paths, bike lanes, and more? The cream will always rise to the top, so if private enterprise wants to fund elite competitions, let them. Other countries can have their medals while we get healthy and live longer, happier, and less stressful lives. An added benefit is that a healthier population will likely reduce health care costs as the incidence rates of diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses fall.

Meanwhile get out your chequebook so hockey player Sidney Crosby can be flown in from Pittsburg to play against the other professionals for Olympic glory.

—DRR