

Promoting physical activity

Think Again is the name of Participation's campaign to raise awareness that children and youth are not as active as they should be, and many parents are unaware of the recommended level of activity for children. The goal is for kids (children age 5 to 11 and youth age 12 to 17) to be active for 60 minutes every day. In theory, school should be providing 30 minutes of daily physical activity, and kids themselves should be making up the rest. The reason, of course, is to help kids stay healthy and help prevent childhood obesity.

The latest evidence from the Canadian Health Measures Survey indicates that only 7% of Canadian kids are meeting the 60 minutes-per-day goal. Childhood obesity rates have increased from 15% to 26% from 1980 to 2004, with rates in the 12-to-17 age group more than doubling—from 14% to 29%. Rates are as high as 41% in Aboriginal youth. In addition, there are new guidelines for sedentary activity recommending that recreational screen time should be no more than 2 hours per day. Currently children and youth average close to 8 hours of screen time per day with only 19% of kids aged 10 to 16 meeting the 2-hour guideline.

We know (or we *should* know) all of this. So what do we do about it? The Public Health Agency of Canada has created a report entitled *Curbing Childhood Obesity: A Federal, Provincial, and Territorial Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights* (www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/framework-cadre/index-eng.php). The report calls for a sustained, multi-

sector response to effectively address this complex problem, including public, private, health professional, and nongovernmental sectors. Although physicians are covered under the health professional sector, it seems we are seldom seen to be an important part of the solution as we are rarely included in the dialogue. Yet, if we compare the impact we have had with smoking cessation, clearly we can play an important role in improving

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outcomes in other important health issues such as childhood obesity.

So what can physicians do to reduce the prevalence of childhood obesity? Many of us have participated in the BCMA's Walk with Your Doc program over the last several years, in which we invite patients to take a walk with us on or around Move for Health Day (10 May).

COHP initiated the Be Active Every Day project this past year—a month-long project leading up to Move for Health Day. The goal was to have physicians contact their local schools and invite the students to top

up the 30 minutes of physical activity they get in school with 30 minutes of activity in their free time. They would then achieve the goal of being active 60 minutes each day, and, one hopes, continue to meet that goal on weekends as well.

We got off to a modest start, with about 16 schools participating. We “beamed in” messages from Canadian astronaut and BCMA member Dr Robert Thirsk, who encouraged kids to be active, limit their screen time, eat their fruits and vegetables, and avoid sugar-sweetened drinks. We received some good feedback from this year's participants and we will be incorporating the suggestions for next year.

We are working with the Ministry of Health to promote the initiative, and are hoping to partner with the Ministry of Education next year to roll out Be Active Every Day in schools throughout the province. However, we need you to help us make this happen in a bigger and more meaningful way. Information on next year's event will be sent out later in the fall. As well, the Canadian Obesity Network will be holding its Third National Summit on Obesity in Vancouver during the first week of May 2013, and we plan on showcasing Be Active Every Day during the Summit. Please contact Erica at etimmerman@bcmj.bc.ca for more information.

Needless to say, doctors should model the behavior we expect of our patients by meeting the Canadian Guidelines for adults of 150 minutes of physical activity per week.

**—Ron Wilson, MD
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Recreation Committee**

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