

## Health promotion: Is it really our job?

**B**C's new health minister, the Honourable Terry Lake, has indicated the importance of health promotion and disease prevention strategies to improve patient health and reduce costs to the health care system. As physicians we have a very important role to play in helping our patients delay or avoid illness, and there are numerous ways in which we can do this. Patients look to their physician for guidance and leadership with regard to their health, and increasingly they are assuming a partnership role with their GP—consulting with their doctor about lifestyle adjustments that will improve how they feel.

We know that kids today are less active than their parents, and it's taking a toll on their health (a detailed report card on the general health and activity level of our kids can be found at [www.activehealthykids.ca](http://www.activehealthykids.ca)). This October, you can help young patients learn the importance of maintaining their good health in a fun and different way. The second annual *Be Active Every Day* initiative will launch on 7 October. During this month-long program, physicians visit neighborhood elementary schools to address students and encourage them to be active every day for 60 minutes—the federal guideline for activity levels for children. This year we have two young Olympic hopefuls participating in the program, encouraging the kids to create a goal and work toward achieving it, just like they do. Ms Andi Naude, a member of the mogul squad for the Canadian Freestyle Ski Association and Ms Mercedes Nicoll, who competes in halfpipe for the Canadian Snowboard Federation, are both hop-

ing to make it to the Sochi Olympics. Ms Nicoll has already competed in two Olympics. The *Be Active Every Day* program will provide weekly video encouragement from Ms Naude and Ms Nicoll and in-person guidance from physicians to inspire students to make physical activity a lifelong habit. If you would like to get involved with this exciting program, please contact Erica Timmerman at [etimmerman@bcma.bc.ca](mailto:etimmerman@bcma.bc.ca).

### **The second annual *Be Active Every Day* initiative will launch on 7 October.**

I recently attended a national meeting sponsored by ParticipACTION that focused on implementing the *Active Canada 20/20* physical activity guidelines. I was the only physician at the meeting—other attendees included government and sport representatives from each province and territory across the country. The meeting took place after the fourth annual *Walk With Your Doc* event, and I was able to show a video of the event that took place in Vancouver ([www.bcma.org/walk-with-your-doc](http://www.bcma.org/walk-with-your-doc)). The event involves physicians organizing a group walk to encourage their sedentary patients to be more active, and the video of the event clearly illustrated to the meeting participants that physicians can play an important role in health promotion initiatives.

We might ask ourselves if we really are making a difference. I believe so. Organizing and planning these kinds of events starts with baby steps. If we start out small and stay consistent with our health promotion strategies, patients will begin to take note of the message we're trying to deliver.

Participation in the *Walk With Your Doc* initiative is increasing every year. This year's event saw 250 physicians host walks with 2700 patients in 33 communities around the province. The *Be Active Every Day* initiative is growing too—although only in its second year, the event already has more physician participants than last year.

If you are interested in other ways to help your patients become more active, read the article published on 17 June in the *CMAJ* entitled "Exercise is Medicine" ([www.cmaj.ca/site/earlyreleases/17june13\\_exercise-is-medicine.xhtml](http://www.cmaj.ca/site/earlyreleases/17june13_exercise-is-medicine.xhtml)). This is an initiative that wants to "... help physicians understand how to make the best use of their limited time in the clinic, with their patients, to provide a physical activity intervention." The article discusses the goal of increasing the number of health care professionals who assess and counsel patients about physical activity and prescribe physical activity to their patients. Discussions of physical activity could also be a topic for group medical visits.

Finally, don't forget to be active yourself and meet the minimum adult physical activity guideline of 150 minutes per week of moderate physical activity. We can walk the talk and promote good health by setting a good example ourselves. These days, our patients expect us to.

—Ron Wilson, MD  
Chair,  
Athletics and  
Recreation Committee

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*This article is the opinion of the Council on Health Promotion and has not been peer reviewed by the BCMJ Editorial Board.*