

Why should physicians take an active role in promoting physical activity?

Because of my belief in the benefits of physical activity, and my passion for encouraging more of it, I have worked at the community, provincial, and national levels promoting physical activity for many years. Currently I am meeting at the leadership table in British Columbia to help create a physical activity strategy for BC. There are many voices present vying for priority at this table.

As a physician I have been the voice promoting physical activity through physicians' offices. What I frequently hear is physicians do not have time to do this properly. And yet above all else, it is physicians who see the people who desperately need to be physically active for their health and well-being. We see patients with chronic diseases, depression, or who are overweight, and who would benefit so much from being physically active.

The day of this writing I saw a patient who had an MI several years ago. He arrested in the ER and was kept alive by the skilled care our medical system has to offer. He recently underwent a stress test and was told he was in far better shape than those almost half his age. He is 70 years old. He walks 4 kilometres every second day and surely this is why he is in such good shape.

We see patients who, if they do not change their lifestyle, could develop chronic diseases in the next several years—lowering their quality of life and further burdening our health care system. As physicians we are better placed than anyone else to influence

those (including ourselves) who need to be physically active.

How then can we be successful in promoting physical activity?

Walk With Your Doc

This is the fifth year that the Council on Health Promotion is encouraging physicians to engage in this growing event on or around 10 May, the World Health Organization's designated day

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to draw awareness to the importance of being physically active. Each year more and more physicians and their patients participate in Walk With Your Doc.

Please have a look at the short video from last year's Vancouver community Walk With Your Doc, as well as a number of photos from the regional events from around the province, at www.bcma.org/walk-with-your-doc. They are truly motivating.

Exercise is Medicine

We have the opportunity to make this event even more meaningful for our patients and ourselves by incorporating Exercise is Medicine into our

practices. This means prescribing exercise or physical activity, where appropriate, as a powerful medicine for our patients. As I have said before in this column, next to not smoking, being physically active is the best thing we and our patients can do for our health.

To help with this task, based on Exercise is Medicine Canada, Doctors of BC has produced exercise prescription pads in which physicians can write an exercise prescription for their less-active patients to help them meet the Canadian guidelines for physical activity. This could include prescribing a certain number of minutes to walk or garden each day, or perhaps some weight-bearing exercises. The extent of health benefits derived from daily physical activity is huge—from better management of chronic disease to its prevention, to improved mental health, to better quality of life and general overall well-being.

As doctors we ought to be role models for our patients who need a bit of help to get moving. We can do this by organizing our own Walk With Your Doc during the week of 3 to 11 May. This is where we demonstrate that we can walk the talk.

We encourage you to give these exercise prescriptions to your less-active patients in the weeks leading up to the Walk With Your Doc event in your community. As Doctors of BC we can take the lead and make a difference for ourselves and our patients.

Contact walkwithyourdoc@doctorsofbc.ca via e-mail for more information, the exercise prescription pad, and to register for Walk With Your Doc.

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

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