

A new year of physical fitness opportunities

It's March and you know what that means. It's time to gear up for Walk With Your Doc. Now before you think, yes, I know about that and I'll get on it, or no, not for me, please read on. There are several new components to the walk this year, some big and some small.

Walk With Your Doc is in its sixth year! And each year we have taken small steps to move this important initiative forward. We started in year 1 by simply asking our patients to go for a walk on or around Move for Health Day (10 May) to emphasize the importance of being physically active.

How important is being physically active? As I have said before, and with the backing of good evidence, next to not smoking, being physically active is the most important thing we can do for our health. The latest tally came to 25 different benefits to our health from being regularly physically active. The latest evidence shows that even walking 20 minutes per day can reduce mortality by 30%.¹ We have been encouraging divisions of family practice to organize these events in their communities, and last year 17 divisions hosted events. We hope that even more will take this on in 2015.

Last year we introduced Prescription (Rx) for Health pads, on which family doctors gave their inactive patients a prescription to be physically active as well as inviting them to join a Walk With Your Doc event in the community. The Canadian guideline for physical activity is to be active for 150 minutes per week for adults. For those who are currently inactive, a reasonable goal would be to start with

just 10 minutes of walking per day and gradually increase that amount. For patients who require more assistance, the prescription pad will also feature the phone number for the Physical Activity Line (PAL). This is an excellent resource for patients. PAL is managed by kinesiologists trained as counsellors to help our patients become more physically active.

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Patients can form a relationship with these counsellors and regularly be in touch with them to gauge their progress. The toll-free number is 1 877 725-1149, and 604 241-2266 in the Lower Mainland.

Now for the quantum leap forward that we are taking this year. This involves forming partnerships with those in our communities who can also help our patients become and continue to be more active. Recently I was privileged to speak at the annual meeting of the BC Recreation and Parks Association (BCRPA) along with the Chilliwack Division of Family Practice. That division partnered with its local RPA around the Be Active Every Day initiative. BCRPA is all about providing opportunities for

people to be physically active, and the local RPAs across the province very much want to partner with us in our Walk With Your Doc events. This is already spontaneously happening in some of our communities. Port Alberni is perhaps the prime example where Walk With Your Doc has morphed into a health fair with booths set up, and I am told every doctor, except for those with emergency responsibilities, comes out for the walk. On a sunny day in 2013 more than 800 patients in Port Alberni attended and went for a walk with their doc. This was in conjunction with their local RPA as well as other community groups.

This year, we aim to partner with local RPAs and make Walk With Your Doc bigger and more effective by helping link our patients with opportunities to be more active. Doctors of BC will help make these connections for us. And divisions of family practice can work directly with their local RPA if they prefer.

Let's do our part to help our patients be healthier and more physically active.

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

Reference

1. Ekelund U, Ward HA, Norat T, et al. Physical activity and all-cause mortality across levels of overall and abdominal adiposity in European men and women: The European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition Study. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2015;101:1-9.

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