

EDITOR'S COMMENT

Sports mad



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As a nation, South Africans are reputed to be sports mad. And looking at the quality and depth of sports journalism, both in print and on television, I think this is a fair comment. But, for too long we have been a nation of couch potatoes as seen in rising levels of obesity and diseases of lifestyle. But, there does seem to be change in the air. Early mornings, particularly over weekends, I see increasing numbers of people out jogging, running, cycling and simply walking. Our mountains are sources of delight for those who choose to get fit by hiking, and canoeing and sea kayaking are becoming increasingly popular. This can only be a good thing.

I have been sports and exercise mad for years. Having been an aerobics instructor to supplement my income as a medical student, I discovered a way of engaging patients in exercise. As a doctor in remote Labrador I used to run aerobics classes, along with the equally fit public health nurse, for the more energetic members of the community. There weren't many of them unfortunately. But, when I introduced a low-impact, toning-type class for older women, the response was enormous! These elderly, mainly chronically ill, women flocked to the classes and were keen participants. They all reported increased well-being, small amounts of weight loss and improvements in joint mobility along with reduction in pain. They also started walking groups among themselves for the days between the classes, and several of them took up cross-country skiing in winter. I can only hope they are still active, as I left the area many years ago. I think this was probably the single most important thing I have ever done for any group of people as a doctor, and I hope that I instilled in them the habit of exercise for life.

With the increasing range of athletic activities being taken up by ordinary people, GPs will be seeing more and more sports-related injuries and problems, and this edition of *CME* will go some way towards helping to deal with these. There are also courses on sports medicine specifically aimed at GPs which are worth considering if your practice has a lot of fit and active people. And this doesn't mean only your younger patients. As the population generally becomes more active, people are continuing to participate in sports well into old age. In fact, the veterans categories of many sports have the largest numbers of participants worldwide, and South Africa is no exception. It will be interesting to see the effects of this on the general quality of life and even longevity, over the next few decades.

In March this year I will be competing in the time trial section of the South African Cycling Federation Championships and in the Cape Argus Cycle tour, so it is fitting that this is the month in which *CME* covers sports medicine. I know many doctors who will also cycle the Argus, some now retired, and at least one of whom, at the age of 80, will almost certainly better my time! Let's hope that interest and participation in sports and exercise continue to increase in South Africa. It's an excellent way of bringing people together and one of the best means of maintaining and improving health in individuals and populations.

CME is published monthly by South African Medical Association Health and Medical Publishing

Private Bag X1, Pinelands, 7430

(Incorporated Association not for gain.

Reg. No. 05/00136/08).

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