

Students' Corner

Letter to the Editor

Health practices of health professionals: do doctors practice what they preach?

Madam, physical activity and fitness of doctors in Pakistan is an issue that has never been given due attention. The Annual Health Walk and Marathon 2009 organized by the Pakistan Medical Association took place in February 2009. The main purpose of the annual event is to increase awareness regarding importance of physical activity and exercise in the general population. In the marathon race, which is actually a half-marathon of 13 miles, participants compete in different categories. There is a separate category for doctors and medical students. Unfortunately however, the participation of not only doctors but medical students also was regrettably low. Only two medical students and no doctors competed in the race. Being an event organized by the PMA substantial participation of doctors and healthcare workers is expected.

It is a well known fact that regular exercise not only decreases the risk of developing many diseases but also decreases stress and improves productivity.¹ Doctors and medical students play a very important role in society and serve as role models for the people. They are at an important position to create awareness of health issues through their practices. It has been seen that doctors do not adequately counsel patients on importance of physical activity and exercise.² Important barriers to this are personal physical activity habits of doctors. Research shows that doctors who themselves act on the advice they provide better counseling and motivation to their patients to adopt such health habits.² Moreover doctors' personal physical activity level during medical school are positively related with frequency of physical activity counseling of their patients.³

Participation of doctors in such events aimed at

increasing awareness is important. Although a marathon race puts immense stress on the body, it has not stopped doctors in other parts of the world from competing in the event.⁴

There is a twofold benefit of doctors' and medical students' participation in such events as the Annual PMA marathon. Doctors who are active and healthy are more productive, just as it is true for anyone else from any walk of life and health behaviour of medical students affect their future practice of medicine.⁵ The other important rationale behind is to "practice what you preach." When doctors actually adopt the positive lifestyle changes to live a healthy life, it sends an important message to the society to follow suit.

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