



LETTERS

PEOPLE AND EXERCISE

Seismic shift in policy needed to increase physical activity

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We agree that there is now considerable evidence that exercise can maintain and promote health.¹ However, Kamberow's suggestions for promoting exercise seem narrow compared with the size and importance of this public health challenge.² We need a seismic shift in public health activity and an approach that is in line with the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion.³

Many professional groups could help promote physical activity, and doctors, especially GPs, could play a pivotal role.¹ They could use their many interactions with individual patients to encourage physical activity, and as community leaders they could advocate for change. However, these roles may not be easy to undertake in parts of the country with severe GP shortages.⁴ Resources will be needed.

Schools are important settings for promoting health, and they should work with pupils and parents in this area. They should encourage pupils to participate in a range of physical activities and help them understand how such activities are beneficial to health.

The social and physical environment can have an important impact on physical activity. Barriers that prevent people from being active need to be removed so that the healthier option will be the easier one. For example, transport and housing policies should support physical activity and active travel.⁵

A multi-sectoral approach will be required to increase physical activity in the population, and national plans will need to target individuals and create supportive environments.³ Government commitment will be necessary to energise all sectors. And because of the scale of this public health issue a dramatic increase in action is urgently needed.

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: www.bmj.com/content/350/bmj.h3024/rr-2.

- 1 Academy of Medical Royal Colleges. Exercise: the miracle cure and the role of the doctor in promoting it. 2015. www.aomrc.org.uk/general-news/exercise-the-miracle-cure.html.
- 2 Kamberow D. Why don't people exercise, even a little? *BMJ* 2015;350:h3024. (4 June.)
- 3 WHO. Ottawa charter for health promotion. 1986. www.who.int/healthpromotion/conferences/previous/ottawa/en/.
- 4 Royal College of General Practitioners. New league table reveals GP shortages across England, as patients set to wait week or more to see family doctor on 67m occasions. 2015. www.rcgp.org.uk/news/2015/february/new-league-table-reveals-gp-shortages-across-england.aspx.
- 5 Active Transport for Healthy Living Coalition. The case for action by the Active Transport for Healthy Living Coalition. 2014. www.adph.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/20140617-Active-Transport-FINAL.pdf.

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2015;351:h3486

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