

Chiropractors tackling the inactivity epidemic

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Physical inactivity is a fast-growing public health concern and contributes to a variety of chronic diseases and health complications. In addition to improving a patient's overall health, increasing physical activity has been proven to be effective in the treatment and prevention of chronic disease. Canadians are facing what is now referred to as an "inactivity epidemic", with tremendous healthcare costs. Physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality. The economic burden of physical inactivity in Canada is approximately 5.3-6 billion dollars per year.¹⁻⁷

The problem with Canadians today is that currently 56% of all adults are physically inactive with 59% of Canadians being overweight or obese. Shockingly, 36% of Canadian adults admit to engaging in no leisure-time physical activity.¹⁻⁷ However, there is also an inconsistency within the healthcare system in Canada. Approximately 34% of patients receive advice from their primary healthcare provider, meaning that 66% of Canadians are not receiving advice on physical activity from their primary healthcare provider. More interestingly is that 40% of healthcare providers do not meet Canadian physical activity guidelines themselves. Furthermore, when healthcare providers are less physically active they are less likely to counsel patients on the importance of physical activity and certainly unlikely to prescribe it as a treatment approach to health. Healthcare providers that do not meet the guidelines are arguably less credible role models for patients for adopting healthy behaviours.¹⁻⁷

A solution for the growing physical inactivity problem is movement. Exercise is Medicine Canada (EIMC) is an initiative focused on encouraging primary care physicians and other health care providers to include exercise prescription when designing treatment plans for patients. Exercise is Medicine is committed to the vision that exercise and physical activity are integral to the prevention and treatment of chronic disease and should be regularly assessed as part of medical care. Exercise is Medicine strives to make physical activity a "vital sign" that is routinely assessed at every patient interaction with a health care provider.

"Exercise is Medicine Canada" is a new nationwide initiative to get Canadians more active and to help patients achieve optimal health. The Royal College of Chiropractic Sports Sciences (RCCSS(C)) is encouraging health-

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care practitioners to use its formal prescription pad to prescribe exercise as a form of medicine to patients. Exercise can be prescribed to treat a dozen of the chronic illnesses, such as diabetes, hypertension and obesity. Using exercise as a form of medicine is based on an abundance of evidence that physical activity, exercise, and movement reduces the risk of chronic disease. The RCCSS(C) is encouraging patients to find simple ways to incorporate movement into their daily routines to ultimately increase health.

The mission of EIMC is to call on all healthcare providers to assess and review every patient's physical activity program at every patient visit. This includes establishing physical activity as a vital sign, educating healthcare professionals about the importance of exercise and physical activity and incorporating exercise and physical activity education into healthcare curriculums. The vision of EIMC is to create an overall improvement in the public's health and ultimately a long-term reduction in healthcare costs to Canadians.

EIMC is a national initiative established approximately 2 years ago and is guided by a task force made up of chiropractic, family and sports medicine, physiotherapy, exercise physiology, and other allied healthcare professionals who are working on increasing the physical activity of their patients.

Last year, Dr. Chris DeGraauw, current president of the RCCSS(C), had the opportunity to attend the Canadian Academy of Sport and Exercise Medicine (CASEM) conference in Whistler, B.C. He attended meetings on EIMC held by Drs. Renata Franckovich and Pierre Fremont of CASEM. It followed that Susan Yungblut, the national task force manager of EIMC, asked Dr. DeGraauw to represent chiropractic on the task force.

Dr. DeGraauw has been working along side other members of the national task force to promote the use of the exercise prescription pad, to design and implement exercise prescription workshops for healthcare practitioners and he is working on a joint position paper regarding the importance of EIMC in our Canadian healthcare system. Most recently (April 2014), he presented on EIMC, exercise prescription, and utilizing the pads, at the Royal College's West sports conference in Vancouver. The attendees were excited to bring this information back to their practices and some were hoping to share the message with their medical colleagues.

Also, the public health committee of the RCCSS(C), chaired by Dr. Michelle Laframboise, has been in contact with Susan Yungblut on getting an "EIMC on Campus" club started at the Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College (CMCC). Drs. Brad Ferguson and Jason Porr with student representative Taylor Tuff have worked to educate the students at CMCC on the importance of EIMC and are currently assisting the Royal College to implement workshops into the 4th year curriculum. Further, Dr. Laframboise was invited to CMCC as a guest lecture to speak on behalf of the RCCSS(C) on EIMC to the student body. The initiative of EIMC on Campus is aimed at fostering early exposure to exercise and healthcare.

Incorporating Exercise is Medicine into healthcare curriculums is an essential element of transforming the overall healthcare system. Currently, there is a lack of undergraduate training in the area of physical activity and exercise prescription. Only 6% of medical schools have a course in exercise prescription. Thus, it is imperative that we start educating healthcare students to make this a standard of practice in the future. Healthcare students need to learn physical activity assessment, prescription and implementation. Also, it is important that students learn how to counsel patients on exercise and behavioural changes. Most importantly, healthcare students should learn how to be role models to create social change. These competencies represent the framework needed to introduce a basic exercise curriculum into undergraduate healthcare curriculums. Training students to integrate these basic skills into their practice from the outset will create a new generation of healthcare providers who have the skills and motivation to improve the health of patients through physical activity practices.⁸

Dr. Scott Howitt, first vice-president of the RCCSS(C), has also been important in conveying the message on EIMC. Dr. Howitt was invited to the 2013 Ontario Chiropractic Association's conference where he spoke about the value of incorporating exercise into patient care to improve overall health and wellness and address the difficult challenge of changing patient behaviours. In this presentation Dr. Howitt explained that chiropractors need to see themselves as positive role models when they prescribe exercise to patients and to make sure that chiropractors are following healthy exercise behaviours by following the Canadian physical activity guidelines. He goes on to say that chiropractors can be influential but need

to practice what they preach. This presentation has been posted as a webinar for all RCCSS(C) members to view at www.rccssc.ca.

As chiropractors, we need to recognize barriers to providing physical activity advice. We need to recognize that inadequate training, inadequate time management, insufficient knowledge and inadequate reimbursement may play a role in not providing proper advice on exercise. Chiropractic educators need to implement formal training for healthcare providers for preventative care with exercise. Also, to use exercise prescription to treat conditions that are associated with physical inactivity. Chiropractors and chiropractic students must learn to create interdisciplinary care plans involving exercise prescription. We need to work together in unison to help educate our patients about living healthy active lifestyles.^{9,10}

The future goal of the RCCSS(C) and EIMC is to increase the amount of healthcare providers, including chiropractors, who prescribe physical activity. This will increase the number of Canadians meeting the physical activity and exercise guidelines. We need to encourage appropriate use of qualified exercise professionals in the prevention of chronic diseases through exercise and physical activity. Finally, physical activity needs to be incorporated as a key health indicator, a vital sign.^{9,10}

Please try to get involved in the initiative to help get Canadians healthier with exercise. Please visit Exercise is Medicine online at www.exerciseismedicine.ca and download your prescription pads. Also, visit www.exerciseismedicinemonth.org and the RCCSS(C) at www.rccssc.ca (members section) which highlights the importance of promoting EIMC in the chiropractic profession. If you are a chiropractic student please join the Exercise

is Medicine on Campus at CMCC. Other healthcare students are advised to visit the Exercise is Medicine website for information on getting schools across Canada onboard with EIMC on Campus.

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