

MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

Exercise, Sport, and Health

Why do we exercise regularly? When I talk about regular exercise to both professional and lay audiences, I often answer that question with a favorite “Ken Cooper story.” (I have mentioned this in previous issues but believe it’s worth repeating.) For those readers who might not know of Ken, he is the physician/exercise physiologist who essentially invented the modern meaning of the Greek word “aerobics.” Having authored several books in the 70s and 80s on this topic, he became most instrumental in popularizing the activity.

In the mid-80s I attended a lecture Ken was giving at an annual meeting of the American Public Health Association on the relationship between regular exercise and health. Over a 20-minute period Ken showed a series of slides from numerous studies on the subject that were available, even back then. Then he stopped and asked the packed audience of health professionals three questions. First, “How many of you exercise regularly?” Almost everyone in the room raised a hand. Next, “How many of you do it because of the data I have just put up on the screen?” A few hands went up. Finally, “Why do you do it?” A chorus came back with the reply, “Because it makes us feel good.”

That reply back in the 80s is the key to why many of us exercise regularly; it makes us feel good. Of course there are numerous health benefits (1) and I should say that everyone reading this “Message” knows that. But consider the articles in this issue of the *AMAA Journal*. Walter Bortz tells us he enjoys running an annual marathon. He writes about and through his work as a geriatrician knows of the health benefits of exercising regularly. They are, of course, very important. But he talks

about his finish this year at Boston, at 7 1/2 hours, at the age of 80, to the cheers of the crowd. Now that’s fun! Walter’s big smile at the finish told it all (see page 10).

Then there’s Mark Courtney, just missing the 3-hour mark in Boston. What were his emotions? First, he experienced disappointment for not making it. Then he felt a sense of relief that the challenge was behind him, at least for this year, and then he went on to feel amazed that he is still going. Lastly, he rejoiced. Do you hear anything about health benefits? Of course they exist and are important but, in this case, the number one benefit is joy. And don’t miss Mark’s self-formulated finish time in his recount of Boston 2010 (see page 9); I’m sure you’ll agree it’s very creative.

Then we have Moses Christian with 200 marathon completions in 17 years, starting at age 61 (and I thought I was doing well, having done 200-plus multi-sport races in 28 years starting at age 46). Are there health benefits? Of course there are, but no one puts in that amount of training and goes through the marathon experience that many times if the *overall* experience and everything derived from it mentally were not fun.

In “Experience Tells Us,” Dr. Kimmel reports on a community-based health promotion/disease prevention program focusing around regular exercise that is physician referred. The program structure helps patients comply because it makes them feel good, as well as bettering their health.

Lastly in this issue, Dr. Paul Kiell’s friend, Martino Caretto, recounts his experience of doing an incredible relay swim across Tampa Bay with Paul and another friend. They did it in part to raise money for bi-polar disorder research, a condition that took the life

of Martino’s son, and the possible role regular exercise and healthy eating has in ameliorating it. Martino was almost overcome by his emotions at both the beginning and the end of their epic journey. But he made the swim and while he did not feel joy, he did feel “somewhat comforted by the thought that [his son was] now at peace.” Again, this is a mental benefit of exercising regularly, in addition to any physical health benefits that it might confer.

I think that when we talk with patients about regular exercise, an activity that takes time and discipline forever, this is the part we should emphasize: regular exercise makes you feel good, *now*. Regular exercise makes you feel better and feel better about yourself, *now*. Regular exercise makes you look better to yourself and to others, *now*. There are certainly countless physical health benefits that come with exercise, many of which come down the road (1), but it is the now that first and foremost keeps us all going. And it’s the now that can help our patients to mobilize their motivation (2).

I hope you enjoy the issue!

Go well,
Dr. Steve Jonas

REFERENCES

1. Physical Activities Guidelines Advisory Committee. *Physical Activities Guidelines Advisory Committee Report, 2008*. Washington, DC: US Dept. of Health and Human Services.
2. Jonas S. Ordinary Mortals Pathway to Mobilizing Motivation, 2009; <http://www.ordinarymortals.net>.