A medical clinic in the park:  

The MOVE program

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Family physicians (FPs) provide care throughout patients’ lifetimes. They are typically the first and continuing point of contact for access to health services, support, and care, and they often deliver preventive care based on the effects of lifestyle choices on the health of their patients.

Suboptimal diet and physical inactivity are common lifestyle choices among the Canadian population. Current physical activity guidelines for adults ages 18-64 recommend at least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic exercise weekly, completed in intervals of at least 10 minutes, along with at least two days per week of resistance training. However, 85% of Canadians fall short of the current physical activity recommendations. In relation to healthy eating, 60% of Canadians report eating less than five daily servings of fruit and vegetables. In contrast, on any given day, 25% of Canadians will eat from a fast food outlet.

A recent Canadian study, exploring cancer incidence due to obesity and physical inactivity, concluded that interventions to reduce these risk factors could prevent thousands of cancers annually. These findings are consistent with an international study which estimated that 3.6% of all new cancer cases in adults were attributable to obesity worldwide. Modifiable lifestyle risk factors including maintaining a healthy weight, eating a healthy diet, and being more physically active could significantly reduce the incidence of cancer in Alberta.

Primary and Team-based Care

Primary care is the optimal setting for most prevention and screening services in the healthcare system. Despite evidence showing that lifestyle interventions could substantially reduce the costs and complications of these medical conditions, the application of these results in primary care has been minimal. In a recent national survey in primary care, less than half of FPs reported discussing obesity and physical activity with their patients during periodic health examinations. Reasons for the poor implementation of lifestyle interventions in primary care include lack of time, lack of resources, and limited training.

**SUMMARY**

Primary care is an optimal setting for most prevention and screening services in the healthcare system.

This issue highlights MOVE, a physician-led, interdisciplinary exercise program that encourages physical activity among patients while in the great outdoors.
Through primary care reform, team-based care has become more common, with FPs working alongside dietitians, kinesiologists, and other providers to support patient care.20 In Alberta, some individual primary care physician offices have joined together in primary care networks (PCNs) to access funding to share the expertise of additional health professionals and dedicated PCN office space. These health professionals may include nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, pharmacists, mental health workers, exercise specialists, or registered dietitians. Every PCN is locally developed by primary care physicians, in cooperation with the local health region and other health professionals. These networks include both rural and urban settings and are diverse in size and available resources. Such team-based care creates the opportunity for programs like MOVE.

An Unconventional Idea

FPs and PCN staff are continually looking for methods that can support their patients in achieving the recommended 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per week. Being a Family Physician, I started to think that perhaps there could be an effective way to engage with patients outside the clinic to encourage them to exercise. Because FPs are indeed a trusted source of health advice, could FPs not only tell patients to get physically active but also show patients how to get physically active by meeting them in their communities to walk alongside them?

This idea, that the powerful influence of a family doctor on patients’ behaviour could be infused into a primary care program encouraging activity among patients, was the catalyst for development of the MOVE program. Utilizing the interdisciplinary team, the Edmonton Oliver PCN helped create and implement MOVE (www.moveyeg.ca), an innovative physician-led, interdisciplinary team-based exercise program.

MOVE began in 2013 with a group of five patients. It is a free, weekly exercise program that provides the opportunity for patients to be physically active alongside an FP and a kinesiologist. In the natural surroundings of a local community park, the exercise program combines walking, strength training, and other physical activities and evidence-based exercises, such as high-intensity interval training. This community-based program takes advantage of trails, hills, stairs, picnic tables, and park benches to teach people how to exercise.

Who Can Join?

MOVE is available to all age groups and anyone is welcome to attend. The program targets beginner and intermediate fitness levels. The patient just needs running shoes, a water bottle, and weather-appropriate clothing.
Why MOVE Works

There are many benefits to this clinic-in-the-park idea. Patients spend less time sitting and achieve daily exercise goals. Patients who are unsure about starting to exercise, or those with medical conditions that invoke fear of going to a gym, feel comfortable participating in MOVE. The family physician and kinesiologist are able to deliver the program to maximize the effects and patient satisfaction. Parking is free and easily accessible. Participants are encouraged to be active outside, without needing to go to a gym or buy any exercise equipment. In addition, there is evidence that time in nature (e.g., sounds of a creek or river) are good for your health.\(^{21,22}\)

Most importantly, the distinguishing feature of MOVE that sets it apart from traditional exercise programs is physician involvement. The presence of a family physician enables patients to exercise in a safe environment with readily available access to a health professional to address any concerns and provide personalized exercise advice.

I have come to love going to MOVE each week for many reasons! Not only are we moving our body and physically becoming stronger, but there’s an entire social aspect to it as well... I love being surrounded by the incredible beauty of the Edmonton River Valley, as we take new paths each week. Then ending with our stretching and strength segment of the program. I highly recommend the MOVE program to absolutely anyone who is looking to start or already has an active lifestyle and for those who want to meet new people and get to know them as you walk yourself to better health!

— MOVE Participant

There is currently no literature on other Canadian fitness programs based in primary care that offer both physician and kinesiologist expertise. The preliminary evaluation of the MOVE program has demonstrated program feasibility, participant satisfaction, and initial improvement in physical abilities.\(^{23}\)

The MOVE program, along with the PCN walking groups and other initiatives, can promote and protect the health of the population by decreasing the risk and recurrence of cancer and many other medical conditions. It is important to empower people to make healthy choices and reduce barriers to being physically active because promoting a healthier lifestyle is always good medicine.

Visit the MOVE website at www.moveyeg.ca for more information or to join.
References:


