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Cardiovascular health

Physical activity exercise and cardiovascular health

M Manca

Over the last few decades, evidence on the beneficial effects of physical activity on health has been accumulating, and public health awareness has increased about the tangible benefits of promoting active habits among the general population.^{1,2} In Nebraska (USA), investment in cycling and pedestrian trail paths has been offset by the direct health benefits alone.³ Studies on physical activity have focused more and more on dose-response effects⁴ and specific effects of different types of training,⁵ and also on the effects of detraining⁶ and side effects of exercise, which seem to be minimal but may occur if individual guidelines are not followed.

To draw together all this information and produce an overall update of the current opportunities to use physical activity in everyday practice, as a treatment itself or to support coexistent drug treatments, Professor Antonio V Gaddi of the University of Bologna and Professor Franco Rusticali of the Myriam Zito Sacco Cardiology Foundation in Forlì organised the "Physical activity, exercise and cardiovascular health" international congress, which was held in Bologna and Forlì (Italy) on 23-25 June 2006, attracting the attention of many of the top experts in this field as well as national authorities.

The congress took a multidisciplinary approach, which is essential for effective transfer of scientific knowledge to

everyday practice^{7,8} and to the continuing growth of the research in this field, dealing with nanotechnologies, telemedicine, mathematical modelling, and space medicine.

In this issue of the journal, the abstracts from spontaneous contributions presented during the congress are published. They present the many different aspects of the relationship of exercise to health, showing the comprehensive approach that the scientific community is taking to this promising area. I would like to draw the readers' attention to two studies. The first, which won the young researchers' prize, presented by Isabel C D Ribeiro *et al*, "Aerobic exercise training reduces the pre-beta 1 hdl generation and enhances the hdl3 antioxidant role in type 2 diabetes mellitus subjects", elegantly investigates one of the many ways that physical activity can enhance the risk profile. The second is the contribution from Kay L Cox *et al*, "Swimming confers long-term improvements in body weight and lipids in older women: the SWEAT 2 study", which addresses the specificity issue of different types of training. However, many challenging messages were contributed by the congress attendees, stressing important concepts on the links between physical activity, dietary integration, and health, highlighting the effectiveness of alternative goals, and gathering new evidence from clinical and epidemiological studies.

Overall, the congress gave the feeling that this is a very vital branch of science and, more importantly, illustrated viable ways to improve personal and community health status cost effectively.

We left with the promise of a subsequent meeting. We hope to meet next time with even better results and within communities capable of receiving this framed message, because improving physical activity, as a lifestyle intervention, means holistic care for the subject together with improvement in the rights of the people.⁹

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