



Millie Nelson, MD (far right), demonstrates her Nordic walking poles at Effingham's first Walk with a Doc event Saturday morning at Village Square Mall.

News Report Photo/Jenna Esgar

First 'Walk with a Doc' promotes healthy lifestyle

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Staying active is essential to a healthy lifestyle.

Everyone knows this, whether they consider being active fun or a necessary evil. For many, however, it can be difficult to sustain.

"When you try to do things by yourself," says cardiologist John Scally, "it's always harder to stick with it."

That's the thought behind HSHS St. Anthony's Memorial Hospital's "JustWalk" Walk with a Doc program. On Saturday, it hosted its first walk at 9 a.m. in the Village Square Mall.

Participants donned their favorite walking shoes to take a stroll with Dr. Scally; Millie Nelson, MD; and Chief Medical Officer Ryan Jennings. The event was open for an hour. Everyone was encouraged to go at their own pace, as long as they kept going.

"There's no question that increasing exercise, even moderately, reduces the risks of many diseases, including coronary

heart disease, breast and colon cancer and Type 2 diabetes," says Dr. Jennings. "Research has even shown you could gain two hours of life for each hour you exercise regularly."

The American Heart Association has also stated that walking for as few as 30 minutes a day can improve blood pressure and sugar levels, enhance mental well-being, and reduce the risk of osteoporosis.

As they trotted by various stores, participants had the opportunity to ask the doctors general health questions. Friends paired up with each other to enjoy healthy conversation while they worked on a healthy heart rate.

"It's a motivator to get you to come back," Dr. Jennings continues. "It's hard to get out and exercise by yourself. If you've got a buddy, you're more likely to do it again."

Walk with a Doc is a national program founded by Dr. David Sabgir. Though the team-up is recent, the medical staff at St. An-

thony's is already enthusiastic.

Each month will feature a doctor who will give a brief, prewalk talk on their area of expertise. This time, it was Dr. Nelson on women's health.

"I am a fitness fanatic," she admitted, brandishing a pair of Nordic walking poles.

February will feature Dr. Scally. This is fitting, as he was the one to initially suggest bringing the program here.

"It's amazing," he says. "The idea is really that simple; just come out and walk."

Dr. Jennings encourages anyone interested to come and join the walks. No payment or pre-registration is needed. They are expected to continue every third Saturday of the month at 9 a.m.

The walks will take place in the mall during winter and any inclement weather. During spring, summer and fall, they will instead be held at the TREC trail. All will be announced at walk-withadoc.org.