



FILL AN EXERCISE PRESCRIPTION WITH WALK WITH A DOC

by Natalie Digate Muth, MD, MPH, RDN, FAAP

DR. DAVID SABGIR was a frustrated cardiologist, repeatedly giving his patients the same advice (“move more”) but seeing little change. Instead of sitting around being upset, he decided to make a difference. He rallied a few patients on a Saturday morning to walk together, branding it Walk with a Doc. Walk with a Doc evolved into a movement in Columbus, Ohio, his hometown, and then to hundreds of communities across the country—including right here in San Diego County.

As physicians, we know that physical activity is an effective treatment for myriad conditions, including weight concerns, depression and anxiety, dyslipidemia, prediabetes and diabetes, and attention problems, among others. A recent Health Affairs study projected that if all 8- to 11-year-olds engaged in exercise for

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25 minutes three times per week, it would prevent \$62.3 billion in healthcare costs over their lifetimes, and prevent 1.2 million cases of overweight and obesity. Not to mention, physical activity helps all of us to be happier and feel better. It is a potent “medication” that is rarely prescribed and too infrequently filled. Knowing this, I often asked myself: What could I do differently to change that for my patients?

That’s how Walk with a Doc Carlsbad was born. Children’s Primary Care Medical Group, Carlsbad Parks and Recreation, and national Walk with a Doc came together to launch the first civilian Walk with a Doc in San Diego County. Walk with a Doc Carlsbad is open to everyone—with a particular focus on families and children—

every Thursday at 4 p.m. at Stagecoach Park in Carlsbad. Each week we start with a nutrition or healthy living demo and skill-building activity, followed by a walk in the park. While I realize we cannot reach everyone with this program, it is a start. And it is a turnkey program that I hope will catch on throughout San Diego.

Walk with a Doc is one way, but, of course, not the only way that we can do more to help our patients increase activity. Healthcare leaders, and even the Surgeon General, are calling on physicians to routinely prescribe exercise—and walking in particular. For example, authors in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* recommend that clinicians do the following to integrate physical activity counseling into their practices:

- Make physical activity a vital sign at each clinic visit.
- Ask if the patient exercises regularly or engages in physical activity.
- Associate physical activity with reduced risk of heart disease, stroke,

diabetes, and many cancers.

- Write a prescription for an agreed-upon daily physical activity.
- Encourage use of a pedometer and advise record keeping.
- Recognize success and encourage reluctant adopters.

Clearly there is a need for opportunities and programs to help both patients and providers to increase physical activity and enjoy it at the same time. Walk with a Doc is one such program that is growing throughout the country. It’s to get started, and provides a tangible way for us to all get moving and provide a concrete way to Walk the Talk. **SDP**

Dr. Muth is a pediatrician and lead of the W.E.L.L. healthy weight clinic and Carlsbad Walk with a Doc at Children’s Primary Care Medical Group-La Costa. She is also involved in the healthcare domain of the National Physical Activity Plan and is senior adviser for healthcare solutions at the American Council on Exercise.



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