

From Mr. B.

Does anyone ever ask you why you work in the physical activity or physical education field? If so, or if you wonder whether this hard work is worth it, consider these facts:

\* Physical inactivity accounts for almost 200,000 U.S. deaths annually (Danaei et al., 2009). It is ranked fourth behind smoking (450,000 deaths), high blood pressure (300,000), and overweight/obesity (200,000 deaths). Of course, physical activity helps people quit smoking, control high blood pressure, and prevent obesity.

\* The World Health Organization (2004) estimates 2 million deaths per year from physical inactivity internationally, making it the 7th leading cause of death.

[http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2636/4128705562\\_225da54096\\_o.gif](http://farm3.static.flickr.com/2636/4128705562_225da54096_o.gif)

\* The 1996 Surgeon General's Report, Physical Activity and Health, identified physical inactivity as a risk factor for early death, cardiovascular diseases, several cancers, Type 2 diabetes, mental health problems, reduced quality of life, osteoporosis, and several other diseases (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

\* The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates at least \$76 billion in health care costs annually from physical inactivity. My taxes might be paying for this!!!

\* Based on recent data from objective monitoring using accelerometers, fewer than 50% of elementary children, 10% of adolescents, and 5% of adults are meeting current physical activity guidelines (Troiano et al., 2007). Thus, the vast majority of the American population is at risk of early death, multiple diseases, reduced quality of life, and higher health care costs due to physical inactivity.

\* The Surgeon General's 2001 Call to Action on obesity (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001) and the Institute of Medicine's 2005 report on Preventing Childhood Obesity (Koplan et al., 2004) identified increased physical activity as essential for reversing the obesity epidemic.

\* The Department of Health and Human Services released the first official government physical activity guidelines in 2008 (Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee, 2008).

\* In the 13 years since the 1996 Surgeon General's Report, about 2.6 million Americans have died because of insufficient progress in increasing physical activity (13 years X 200,000 deaths per year).

Are you now more convinced than ever that promoting physical activity is a very high priority? Don't you think everyone should place a high value on physical activity? So do I, but unfortunately, not everyone values physical activity. This includes many of the groups responsible for improving health in the United States.

I want to call your attention to the October 2009 issue of Preventive Medicine. It contains a series of short commentaries that explain why

more emphasis needs to be placed on promoting physical activity and what changes are needed to be successful. This issue grew out of a startling revelation. The National Institutes of Health published a list of 214 research topics for which it tracks funding. The list included every disease you ever heard of, enzymes you have not heard of, and a wide range of health behaviors, including diet, smoking, alcohol abuse, and violence. Everything important to health-except physical activity. It later became clear that NIH tracks 360 research topics, and physical activity was not on that list either-despite the fact that NIH has spent hundreds of millions of dollars over several decades on physical activity research.

Of course, this news was upsetting to physical activity professionals. How could the world's leading health research organization not care enough to track spending on one of the leading health issues? The editor of Preventive Medicine decided the NIH situation was a symptom of a larger problem of physical activity being undervalued in every part of the health field. As just one example, every state, city, and county health department has many nutritionists, but most state health departments only have one physical activity specialist, and that person may be a nutritionist working on physical activity part-time. The journal is freely available online, and the short commentaries are easy to read:

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