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We need to take physical inactivity as seriously as smoking - say leading doctors

Physical inactivity should be given equal priority to smoking and alcohol abuse by healthcare professionals claims a report to be issued today (Thursday 15 January 2015) by leading doctors at the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow.

Questions about whether you smoke and the amount of alcohol you consume are routinely asked at medical assessments. Today, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow have called for questions about physical activity to be asked regularly in both hospitals and GP settings, and appropriate advice given to enable patients to be more active more often.

Evidence is emerging about the scale of the problem of physical inactivity. In 2012, leading medical journal *The Lancet* labelled the problem “pandemic”, accounting for more than five million deaths around the world every year – equivalent to the number of deaths caused by smoking. In Scotland alone the Chief Medical Officer says over 2,500 deaths per year are directly due to physical inactivity, and the cost to the economy is £660 million. Globally, levels of physical activity are decreasing, although data from the recent Scottish Health Survey suggests Scotland is one of very few countries worldwide where physical activity levels are increasing in adults and children.

Clinical Leadership Fellow at the College, Dr Andrew Murray said:

“The evidence of the benefits of regular physical activity is becoming stronger every year. Our clear message to patients is that regular physical activity is one of the best things you can do for your health. Any form of physical activity for example walking or cycling as part of the commute, or walking or sport in leisure time gets the happy hormones going, and helps prevent over 40 major diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart attacks and some types of cancer. Every step is a step to health and happiness.

“Scotland’s Chief Medical Officer recently labelled physical inactivity as the fourth biggest killer in Scotland, and urged all health professionals, including doctors, to ask patients about physical activity levels, and offer appropriate brief advice on how to be more active more often. This is not happening routinely in our hospitals or GP surgeries and we are calling for that to change.”

President of the College, Dr Frank Dunn CBE said: “Increasing physical activity must be given equal priority to smoking cessation and addressing harmful use of alcohol. Despite the serious impact of physical inactivity on health, current strategies for helping people to become more active falls far behind the support given to people to quit smoking, for example. Yet, small changes in a person’s



level of activity can significantly impact on their health – for example, we know that just 30 minutes of exercise daily can reduce early death by 30%.”

Honorary Secretary of the College, Professor Hazel Scott added: “There are some outstanding groups like World Walking, the Ramblers and 5x50 we are working closely with, whilst we are also working with leading Universities to teach tomorrow’s doctors and nurses about improving physical activity levels. Medical leaders in Scotland and worldwide have this issue high on their agenda, and we see increasing physical activity as a major health priority. All health professionals are busy, but just as we would help patients with high cholesterol, it is the right thing to do to help increase physical activity and it is cost effective.”

Building on 2014 work which included a major 2 day international conference, and support for diabetic patients in the “Beat Diabetes” campaign, the College has produced a report and recommendations calling for physical activity to be incorporated into all levels of patient management. This includes questions about a patient’s levels of physical activity being asked alongside questions about whether they smoke or drink, as well as plans to incorporate physical activity into the curriculum for doctors in training.

In 2015 work continues on e-learning material for the profession, and developing assessments for medical and surgical examinations as well as working with medical leaders including the Scottish Academy of Royal Colleges, Health Boards and the Scottish Government to help embed increasing physical activity as a routine and prominent part of what the NHS does.

In their report, the College stress the importance of health professionals leading by example and being role models for physical activity. In order to achieve this, they call for health boards to support their staff with simple physical activity challenges, walking routes, and providing showers where possible.

The full report can be accessed here: <http://rcp.sg/physicalactivity>

The launch of this report has been timed to coincide with an event on “Diabetes and Endocrinology” being held in the College on Thursday 15 January 2015. Physical inactivity is a known factor in the causes of type 2 diabetes.

Images available on request:

- Dr Andrew Murray
- Dr Frank Dunn
- Images from the College organised “Clinicians on the Clyde 5k run”

Contact:

Please contact Elaine Mulcahy on 0141 221 6072 or media@rcpsg.ac.uk to arrange an interview
Or Andrew Murray on 07791303980 or docandrewmurray@googlemail.com



ROYAL COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF GLASGOW

Notes to editors:

The **Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow** is the only multidisciplinary Royal College in the UK. Its membership, which exceeds 11,000, includes physicians, surgeons, dental practitioners, travel medicine and podiatric medicine professionals. The College provides career support to the membership through education, training, professional development, examinations and assessment whilst acting as a charity and leading voice on health issues in order to set the highest possible standards of health care.