



## Time to lose the sick man image

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**In 1992, the Wall Street Journal published an article about Glasgow's poor health record entitled "being dead ain't pure brilliant." It focussed on lifestyle and eating habits of many Glaswegians and the appalling statistics for life expectancy in some parts of the city. Twenty years later, a report by the Glasgow Centre for Public Health asked if Scotland was "Still the sick man of Europe." Their findings suggested that while the country still had a long way to go, there had been several notable improvements in Scottish mortality in the sixty years from 1950-2010.**

Without question, we have continued to see progress in a number of areas since then.

Scotland was the first UK country to introduce a ban on smoking in public places, which has had direct health benefits. There is also clear evidence that people in Glasgow are more active than they were 20 years ago. More people are cycling, walking and running, while the number of five-a-side football pitches and gyms has dramatically increased. Schools are providing healthier meals.

Many challenges remain. Deaths through violence, drugs and alcohol contribute majorly to death rates in Glasgow and much needs to be done to establish a coherent social fabric in those areas with generational unemployment and little incentive to lead a healthy life.

Obesity is typically presented as pictures of people who are markedly overweight. This deflects our attention from the 60% of the population who are overweight to some degree. We need to focus on a message of healthy eating with moderate caloric intake combined with 30 minutes of exercise five times a week; whatever exercise appeals. This will allow us to live a better quality of life with an increased life expectancy.

The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde recently embarked on a health legacy project with 60 people with type two diabetes who are also overweight. Our hope is that the health benefits seen in these people following a programme of exercise and healthy eating will have a ripple effect across the community.

The upcoming Commonwealth Games offers a golden opportunity for Glasgow to shed the sick man image and focus on its health. There are a number of examples around the world of a ripple effect where people buy into the lifestyle of the few by observing the benefits in terms of physical and mental health.

Glasgow is grasping this opportunity and changing to a city that can lead the world in healthy living.