

Editor's comment

Overmedicalising – again!



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On the morning of Thursday 1 November I, along with several thousand other people, spent nearly 2 hours trying to enter the Two Oceans half marathon. The website was doomed to clog up because entries on that date were only open to those who had run the race before and were limited to 10 000. However, what really held it up was an enormous 13-page medical questionnaire that had to be filled out as part of the entry process. A similar questionnaire was introduced last year, but could be filled out later, once you had your entry. However, the race organisers (and the sports scientists involved) decided, in their wisdom, that this questionnaire was so important that it must now be part of the entry process.

Last year's questionnaire was relatively simple and straightforward. The questions were on topics such as recent or chronic injuries, number of years as a recreational runner, weekly training distances, chronic illnesses that might have an effect on your ability to run, such as asthma and cardiac

diseases. This year's questionnaire was essentially a full medical history, including such gems as family history of chronic illness. Needless to say most sensible people just entered 'no' for everything. If you put in 'yes' the process took even longer. I did admit to having asthma, but I wasn't going to say anything about heart disease in my 82-year-old mother, who is quite entitled to have heart 'disease' at that age! From the comments on Facebook I gather that most people who have entered are in the peak of health, exceptionally fit, and they and their families have never had a day's illness in their lives.

At the end of this laborious process you could give or withhold consent for your information to be used for research, including research leading to higher degrees. A laudable aim, but has anyone actually thought about what it is that they are trying to establish from 'research' using this random, shotgun approach to gathering data? Will anyone in sports science now

actually use the data, having read the comments on Facebook (and this editorial)? I sincerely hope not, or perhaps research methods have changed since I did my PhD.

At the beginning of the questionnaire there was a long explanation of why all these medical questions were now regarded as necessary – apparently last year's event had fewer medical incidents than previously and this has been ascribed to people filling out the questionnaire. Are we now sliding into a nanny state approach where race organisers will contact you and ask you not to run if you admit to having the occasional arrhythmia?

I did manage to enter the race, but to cap it all, at the end of that laborious process I wasn't given the seeding that I had worked so hard for by massively improving my time over 10 km. Perhaps answering 'yes' to anything on the questionnaire means that you start at the back regardless – never mind. I just hope that it doesn't rain next year!

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