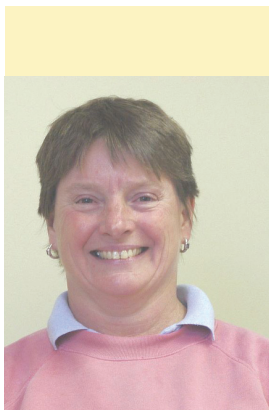


EDITOR'S COMMENT

A weighty problem



BRIDGET FARHAM

ugqirha@iafrica.com

*CME is published monthly by the South African Medical Association Health and Medical Publishing Group
Private Bag X1, Pinelands, 7430
(Incorporated Association not for gain.
Reg. No. 05/00136/08).*

Correspondence for CME should be addressed to the Editor at the above address.

Tel. (021) 530-6520

Fax (021) 531-4126

E-mail: publishing@samedical.org

Head Office:

PO Box 74789, Lynnwood Ridge, 0040

Tel. (012) 481-2000

Fax (012) 481-2100

This month's issue is focused on weight control, a topical subject in a season of overindulgence that often leads to weight gain and a series of new-year resolutions about changes in diet and lifestyle. Overweight and obesity have become a major public health issue in both the developing and the developed world. We evolved as a species without an abundant food supply, relying on sporadic times of plenty by building up reserves that kept us going through the lean times. In this time of abundant food, albeit for a relatively small proportion of the world's population, that evolutionary trait has led to the multiple chronic diseases of lifestyle that are so intimately associated with being overweight.

It should be a simple equation: energy in versus energy out. But, as most people know so well, there is nothing simple about weight loss. Four years ago, my husband and I had a Damascene change in lifestyle. Suddenly deciding that we really needed to shed the kilograms that had accumulated over time, we embarked on a life of extreme athletic training, combined with a relatively small overhaul of our diet. As a result Craig lost 22% of his body weight and I lost 17%. What is more remarkable, and almost unheard of in the literature, is that we have maintained, and even added to, that initial weight loss. However, to do this we both have athletic schedules that would not disgrace a professional! Craig is a league cyclist and has recently taken up running as well – he trains and races, hard, for about 8 hours a week. While I have never reached Craig's exalted heights of athletic performance, by the time you read this editorial I will have run my first half marathon, after recently adding running to a cycling training schedule rather more punishing than Craig's, probably because I am totally obsessive about exercise and need to train harder to achieve anything anyway. And this is what it seems to take to achieve and maintain this sort of weight loss and total change in body composition. Even elite athletes, such as the world's top cyclists, have to watch every mouthful of food they eat in order to achieve a competitive weight that they often only manage to maintain for a few weeks each year. What chance has the average man in the street? Unfortunately, most people don't enjoy the amounts of exercise that we do. I have run 4 10-km races in the past 6 weeks, and even listening to my fellow runners at these races I can sense that I have an enjoyment of physical exertion that is unusual. So, there is a desperate need for the kind of information carried in this edition of CME. All of you will have patients and family members who will come to you for advice on weight loss. You may even need some yourself!

The guest editor, Vicki Lambert, and I go back a long way. Right back to the time when Tim Noakes had a poky little office in the basement of the physiology building at UCT Medical School, one lab and a few exercise-crazy students. We have all moved on since then and it has been a pleasure to read such interesting and up-to-date approaches to weight control, knowing that these are trustworthy sources of information and free from the misinformation that characterises so much of what you can read on the subject.

In the new year there will be some minor changes to the format of CME – one of which will be that we will no longer be publishing photographs of the authors and editors. I think that for most people that will be a relief, since few people are happy with images of themselves and finding decent-quality photographs is a problem.

We have had a tremendous response to the request for art for the covers, and hopefully have enough for some time to come, but if you haven't already sent material through and would still like to do so, please don't hesitate. It has been wonderful to see the range of talent among doctors and I am surprised that people can find the time to add art to an already overloaded schedule.

Finally, I must say thank you for all your support through 2005 and, along with the rest of the CME team, wish all readers a peaceful and enjoyable holiday season and an excellent 2006.