

The importance of physical exercise to prevent ill-health was highlighted during the launch of a campaign by the Malta Association of Physiotherapists (MAP) in collaboration with the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Unit on Sunday 13th September 2009.

Aptly titled Movement for Health, the awareness campaign was launched as part of World Physiotherapy Day, celebrated on September 8, and consists of 2 Fun Walks: 1 in Sliema on Sunday 20th September and another in Valletta on September 28. Another walk, which was scheduled for the 13th September in the Attard area, was cancelled due to the inclement weather.

The association also published a leaflet entitled Il-Mixi. Tajjeb Għalik, Tajjeb Għal Saħħtek (Walking Is Good For You, Good For Your Health), containing tips for an improved walking experience.

"New diseases caused by changes in lifestyle have emerged over the years," Social Policy Minister John Dalli said at the launch, held at San Anton Palace, Attard. "We must strike the right balance between our hectic schedules, a proper diet and physical activity."

He appealed to the Maltese to be active for their own well-being and emphasised the importance of having a sustainable health system. Prevention was essential to cut down on expenses in the public health sector, he said. "This is the way forward and we must invest in such campaigns."

Mr Dalli had words of praise for physiotherapists, saying it was a growing profession. In the coming years, the country would need more physiotherapists to work in the community.

MAP president John Xerri de Caro reiterated the importance of prevention as a means of cutting health costs in the future or "at least, be in a better position to cope with them".

He said that, unfortunately, there was an increased incidence of obesity among children. But physical exercise could help in combating this disease together with another common cardiovascular and circulatory illness: diabetes.

"Although simple in concept, the message of this campaign is a very powerful one. Walking is not only an activity that can make you feel good but it also makes you healthy."

Charmaine Gauci, director of the Health Promotion Unit, explained more long-term advantages of physical exercise. "The longer you stay active, the higher the possibility of remaining independent in older years," she said. "You are less likely to develop problems associated with depression and increase your chances of living longer."

Also present for the launch were representatives of the European Region of the World Confederation for Physical Therapy (ER-WPCT), of which MAP is a member. The WCPT is the sole international organisation representing physical therapists worldwide.

"At present, due to many factors, such as climate change, people are spending less time exercising, including walking," said Roland Craps, second vice chairman of the region. He said the European Community was becoming more and more concerned with this

problem and wanted to tackle it before it harmed the economy. "And there is no better way to promote movement than through such campaigns," he said.

Fact box

- About 350 million people are obese worldwide. Physical activity is one of the best means of countering obesity.
- Children and young people under the age of 18 need 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity each day to promote and maintain health.
- Adults need 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five days a week or 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity three days a week to maintain health. Plus they need to do muscle strengthening exercises at least twice a week.
- Research has shown that physical therapy exercise prescriptions help women who experience incontinence, osteoporosis or breast cancer surgery.
- Studies have indicated that physical therapy treatments have a major impact on conditions such as back and neck pain.
- Physical activity provided under the guidance and supervision of a physical therapist reduces the risk of heart attack, stroke, type 2 diabetes, colon cancer and breast cancer.
- Physical therapists provide exercise programmes for conditions that affect the bones and muscles, such as arthritis, back and neck pain, osteoporosis, joint replacements and urinary incontinence.

Source: WCPT

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