

Letter to the Editor

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Dear Editors:

I would like to thank you very much for sending the framed and signed cover of the first UBC Medical Journal. This framed picture will be placed in a public area of the Island Medical Program building to preserve the memory of this important milestone. I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate you and your colleagues for the successful launch of the UBCMJ. I am impressed by the quality of the articles and the artwork, and by the level of interest, participation, and commitment by students and faculty alike.

Yours sincerely,

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The Launch of the Men's Health Initiative of British Columbia

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Drawing on the Olympic Motto, "Citius, Altius, Fortius" or "Swifter, Higher, Stronger", athletes took centre stage, celebrating sport and health at the Twenty-first Winter Olympic Games in Vancouver. However, as British Columbians embraced this Olympic spirit, a different motto will represent the average health of men in this province: "Slower, Weaker, Unhealthier". Launched in the fall of 2009, the Men's Health Initiative of British Columbia (MHIBC) aims to address this issue and impart change to the overall health of men in BC.

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The MHIBC is a novel idea led by Dr. Larry Goldenberg, Clinical Head of the Department of Urological Sciences at the University of British Columbia. The MHIBC will be a centre of excellence that focuses on improving men's health and quality of life through leadership, awareness, education, research, and the dissemination of best practices for clinical care in areas such as cardiac, bone, mental, sexual, and testosterone health.

The first order of business was the launch of the MHIBC website, <http://www.aboutmen.ca>, an interactive website highlighting important information on men's health for both the public and health care practitioners. This was followed by the release of the "Men's Health Report" in January 2010,¹ which emphasized the most significant issues in men's health and made recommendations to improve clinical practice, research, and health policy.

"Many 40-year-old men are more interested in looking after their cars than their bodies," says Dr. Goldenberg. "We know this catches up to them in the form of acute illness, chronic disease, and even depression, so our goals are to understand the complex issues that affect men's well-being, to make men and their families aware of [the health risk men face], how they may be able to prevent illness later in life, and to improve men's access to gender-specific health services. In this way men can potentially add ten good, quality years to the middle of their lives, postpone [the symptoms of old age], and help themselves to grow older without growing old."

It is alarming to learn that the average life expectancy of men in BC is 76 years, which is over 4 years shorter than that of women. Furthermore, the average number of healthy years for men in BC is 65 years, representing 11 years of quality life lost from poor health and disability before death.²

Clearly there are biological, social, and cultural pressures that have significantly impacted gender differences in morbidity and mortality in this province. For example, according to a report compiled by Dr. Dan Bilsker for the MHIBC, men are more likely to die from diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer than women.

Additionally, men get in more motor vehicle accidents, have higher suicide death rates and comprise 97% of workplace deaths. While a women's health movement established itself over the last twenty years, men have continued to underutilize health care services and fall further behind women in their overall health. It was this gap in men's health that motivated the development of the MHIBC.

And so, it is through the MHIBC that we hope to improve the health of men in BC so that they too can be "Swifter, Higher, Stronger".³

REFERENCES

1. Bilsker, D., Goldenberg, L., and Davison, J. Men's Health: New Directions in Research, Policy & Practice. Mens Health Initiative of British Columbia and Centre for Applied Health and Research. 2010.
2. Selected Vital Statistics and Health Status Indicators. One Hundred Thirty-Fifth Annual Report 2006 [Internet]. BC Ministry of Health; c2006 [cited 2010 Feb 20]; Available from: URL: <http://www.vs.gov.bc.ca/stats/annual/2006/index.html>.