

Exercise prescriptions endorsed

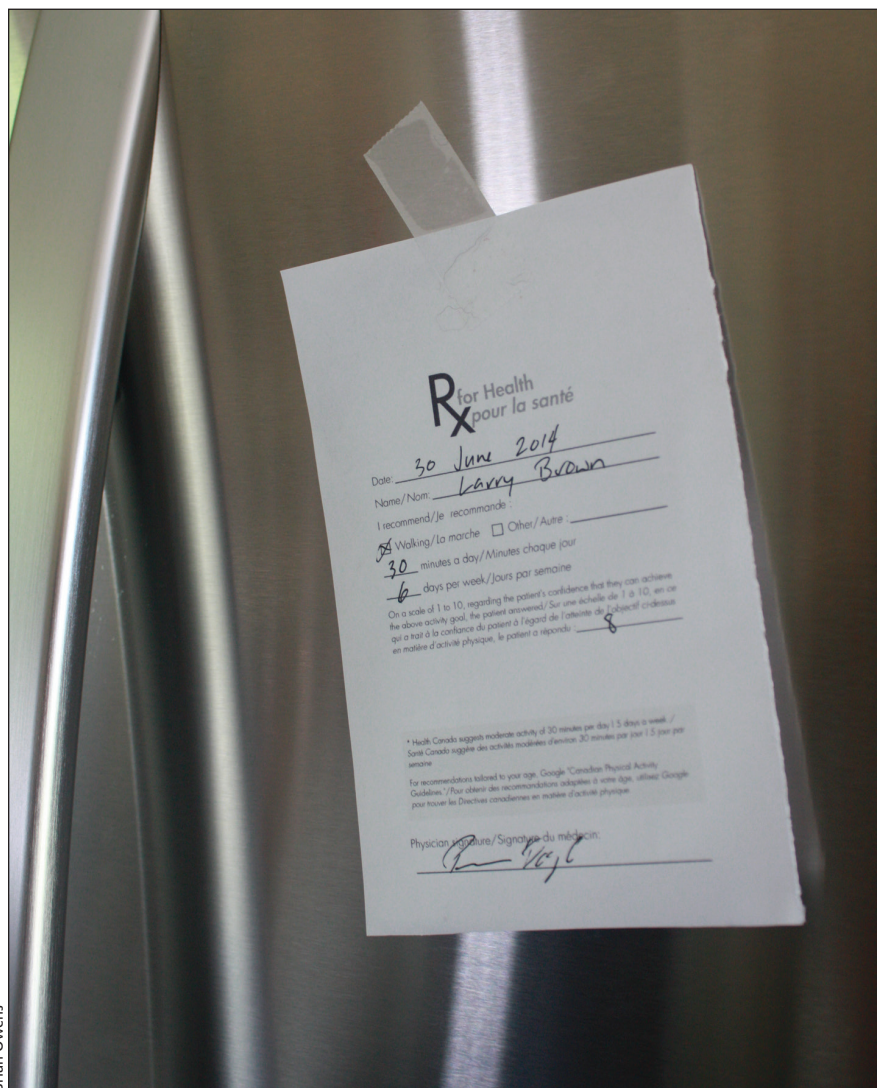
Doctors in two Canadian provinces are using exercise prescription pads to encourage patients to lead healthier, more active lifestyles. Doctors of BC and the New Brunswick Medical Society (NBMS) offer free pads to their members so they can give patients a physical reminder of the exercise advice they've been given by their physicians.

Dr. Lynn Hansen, president of NBMS, said the pads are intended to help patients stick to their exercise regimes. "If they have something in writing, it provides a more permanent reminder of the conversation they had with their doctor," she said. "We know not everything that is said in the doctor's office is retained."

The pads, which look similar to standard drug prescription pads, allow doctors to provide specific instructions about how much exercise a patient should try to get each week. It has checkboxes to specify walking or other exercise, how many minutes per day and the number of days per week. The New Brunswick version also includes a space for physicians to write in further instructions, including specific activities or dietary and other lifestyle advice, said Hansen.

British Columbia started providing the pads in March of this year; New Brunswick followed suit in May. Other groups have provided similar pads before, but the two associations are the only ones to do it province-wide. Two years ago, the international initiative Exercise is Medicine launched a Canadian chapter with the goal of increasing the number of doctors in Canada who provide counsel about physical activity and prescribe it for their patients.

Research has shown that physical activity can be as or more effective than drugs at treating conditions like obesity, depression and diabetes, said Mathieu Bélanger, director of research at the Medical Training Centre, Université de



Brian Owens

The New Brunswick Medical Society's exercise prescription pad is easy to fill out.

Moncton in New Brunswick. About 14% of physicians already prescribe exercise in written form, says Bélanger, and many use dedicated pads.

Bélanger said that having the pads provided by highly regarded, official groups such as provincial medical associations should help expand the practice. The New Brunswick pads are the best he has seen. They are easy to fill out but include all of the necessary information.

So far, more than 100 doctors in New Brunswick have ordered the pads, which NBMS is offering as part of its larger campaign to improve patients' accountability for their own health. "We want to promote not just what a doctor or hospital can do, but what patients can do for themselves," said Hansen. — Brian Owens, St. Stephen, NB

CMAJ 2014. DOI:10.1503/cmaj.109-4846