

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Physicians' Fitness Serves Many Goals

Until recently, regular exercise was an afterthought for Dr. Rita Sanders.

A mother of six children who finished her ob.gyn. residency in 1996 at the age of 46, she figured she had enough demands on her time.

"I was raised in an era when women didn't exercise," said Dr. Sanders, who was raised in New Jersey and now has her own ob.gyn. practice in Broken Arrow, Okla. "We got in trouble if we played tag on the playground."

When she and her family moved to Tulsa for her residency in 1992, she began running "just for fun." But a few years ago, she joined a running group and became more committed than ever to staying fit. These days she runs 20-25 miles a week and weight-trains at least twice a week. In June, she and her husband traveled to Anchorage, Alaska, where she competed in her fourth half-marathon on the heels of celebrating their 30th wedding anniversary.

"I seldom have a day go by that I don't get at least an hour's worth of exercise in," she said.

She attributes her success to motivation and support that she finds from the other 20 or so members of her running group. "We push each other along," she said.

Running brings peace of mind to her busy life. She describes it as "a time when I can totally get away from everything else I'm doing. I'm with people who don't care what I do. They don't ask me questions about gynecology. Everybody comes from all different walks of life."

Running also helps her cope with the increasingly competitive nature of ob.gyn. practice. "There is so much emphasis on volume and of course insurance companies have paid us so much less," she said.

Twelve Exercise Essentials

According to a survey of 36,000 fitness professionals conducted by the San Diego-based American Council on Exercise, the top 12 exercise essentials are:

1. Good shoes.
2. Fun or appropriate music.
3. Free weights.
4. A positive attitude.
5. Comfortable clothing.
6. Lots of water.
7. A supportive sports bra.
8. Safe, well-made equipment, such as cardio machines and heart rate monitors.
9. Weight-training gloves.
10. Enough time.
11. A workout partner.
12. Fresh, clean air and/or sunshine.

Source: American Council on Exercise.



Dr. Michael Bayer, who biked cross-country to help fund free wheelchairs, presents one to a patient in Vietnam.

"But I realize that it's not all about money. I want to be healthy for my children and my grandchildren."

Dr. Sanders opened her solo practice 5 years ago, which gives her flexibility in scheduling patients. On Mondays and Tuesdays, she starts seeing patients at 10 a.m., "so I can get runs in the morning if I need to." The evening jogs with members of her running group start at 6 p.m. "So, on some days, I finish my office work at 5:30 p.m. and then go run," she said. "I always have my running clothes in the car."

Dr. Sanders runs with her pager and her cell phone. She has no covering partners, but she does have someone to help in emergencies and when she's away on vacation. "If I anticipate that I'm going to have a delivery that day, I'll try to get my run in during lunch, but I would never do a long run if I had somebody in labor," she said. "If I have someone in labor, I will often run near the hospital so I can be close by."

"You don't have run 20 miles a week," Dr. Sanders said. "You can walk. It's still getting out there and exercising every day."

'I Can Run Anywhere'

Another ob.gyn., Dr. Angela Meikle, began running more than 20 miles each week during her sophomore year at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y. At the beginning of each semester, she would pore over her class schedule and other commitments and schedule time for exercise.

"That was always the first thing that came into my mind when I had my schedule: 'What time can I run?'" recalled Dr. Meikle, who practices in Brooklyn, N.Y. "When I started working, I did the same thing."

Running "is just something that I like to do," said Dr. Meikle, who is a mother of four children, aged 11-18. "Since I've been doing it so long, I know when I don't run because I feel sluggish. I get cranky. It's like I need my high, so I need to run."

Residency posed a challenge to staying on track, especially the 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. shift. During that period of time, she would leave her post, go straight to the gym to work out, go home to cook, sleep 5 hours, wake up to go over homework, and then leave for work.

These days when she puts on her running shoes and hits the pavement, it marks the only "alone time" Dr. Meikle has in a given day. "This is the only time it's just me, because it's either the patients or the kids or something else that needs to be done," she said.

She gave up on having a regular running partner after too many people

gave excuses for not joining her for jogs, such as "I'm too tired" or "I came to work late." She prefers running outside to running indoors on a treadmill, even in the wintertime. "The only problem in the wintertime is it gets darker sooner, so you're limited," she said. "I don't like running by myself at night. I [use] a treadmill if I need to."

On Tuesdays, Dr. Meikle's office hours start at 1 p.m., which affords her ample running time in the morning. Her office hours on the other days of the week start at 10 a.m., "but if I have patients in the hospital, I have to see them earlier," she said. "I try to start my days with a run."

She emphasized that you always can find time for exercise. "You may not have a lot of time, but even that little bit helps," she said, noting that all of her children are active in one sport or another. "Then you become more efficient. I have my gym bag. I always have my sneakers with me. I can run anywhere."

Cross-Country for a Cause

A former All-American basketball player for Newman University in Wichita, Kan., Dr. Michael Bayer knows a thing or two about how to stay in good physical condition. But nothing could prepare him for a cross-country bicycle trip he made this spring from New York City to Newport Beach, Calif., as a fund-raiser for the Free Wheelchair Mission (www.freewheelchairmission.org), a not-for-profit charity that has delivered more than 200,000 low-cost wheelchairs to disadvantaged people in more than 54 countries.

"I'm pretty tired; it's pretty exhausting," Dr. Bayer said in a telephone interview from Wichita, an approximate halfway point after biking more than 1,700 miles. "It's harder than I thought it would be."

Entitled the "Ride for Mobility" and sponsored by Reader's Digest, the journey began April 20 and ended June 16. The purpose of the ride was to raise \$670,000, which is the cost of making and distributing 15,000 of the nonmotorized wheelchairs to physically challenged people in developing countries. As of June 13, they had raised about \$380,000.

"There is a great need out there," said Dr. Bayer, an orthopedic surgeon who co-founded Free Wheelchair Mission 6 years

ago with former biomedical engineer Don Schoendorfer, Ph.D. "Twenty percent of the people we give wheelchairs to live on the ground. They either have to lie on the ground because they're too poor to afford a bed, or they actually crawl. Getting bitten by snakes is the No. 1 cause of death in Asia and Africa among the disabled populations that live on the ground."

Dr. Schoendorfer designed the wheelchairs, which are made of plastic chairs, metal tubing, and mountain bike tires. At a cost of about \$45, each chair is assembled in China, shipped to the receiving country, and personally delivered by a volunteer.

"That can change someone's life immediately from being bedridden, languishing, and hopeless to having a reason to get up in the morning and having mobility to do a number of things," Dr. Bayer said.

He bought his bike just 2 months before the cross-country trek began, and prepared with intensive workouts that included lifting weights, core strengthening, and spin classes.

"For physicians who don't have a lot of



After completing a half marathon in Alaska, Dr. Rita Sanders posed with the Wild About Anchorage moose mascot.

time, those spin classes are really good," he said.

To stay on schedule, Dr. Bayer and Dr. Schoendorfer biked about 5 hours nearly every day. The grueling routine "makes me want to say I'm never going to get on a bike again," Dr. Bayer said. "When I'm riding this bicycle across the country I keep thinking, 'I wish I was playing basketball. It would be a lot more fun than riding this bicycle for 5 hours.' But there's also a certain addictive part to it. I think I'll probably always be a bike rider after this trip."

By Doug Brunk, San Diego Bureau

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