

Ranting and Raving about Exercise & Society

an editorial by Ann Gerhardt, MD

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What will it take to get people moving their bodies enough to preserve their health??? **Is it going to take gas prices of \$10 a gallon to get people out of their cars and using muscular propulsion?** I'm probably one of the three people who are unhappy with the recent gas-price decline. I rather liked the bump in transit use and number of cyclists on the roads.

What will it take to get people to realize that our health insurance rates will decline if people move enough to avoid chronic disease? That we might have less road-rage if fewer people drive and more dissipate their stress with physical activity? That our productivity will improve if we sleep better and clearer minds?

It wasn't polite requests that got people to buckle-up. It took seat belt laws. Smoking hasn't declined because people woke up and discovered it was harmful to their health. It has taken years of anti-smoking campaigns, public-place prohibitions to save non-smokers' lives and a culture of smoking-is-ugly, to vilify tobacco.

Do we need legislated pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods for it to be safe for children to play outside and walk to school? **When will mixed-use communities come back into favor, so we can remember that it might be possible to use our feet or transit shop and commute?** Getting out of cars and onto our feet might even reduce pollution enough to save a young child from an asthma attack and you from a heart attack.

Whatever happened to the concept of personal responsibility for health (or anything else)? I'm all for helping people who can't help themselves, but I'd prefer that more of us work harder, earlier, to avoid needing medical help.

We need to put money into transit, rather than roads, build multi-use, walkable communities, rather than living places (suburbs) far away from working places, tax the @#\$\$% out of cigarettes and gasoline (to pay for the health consequences of using them), and create a society that reveres two-footed over four-wheeled propulsion.

Many of physical activity's benefits can't be "proven" because they can't be neatly quantitated in ways satisfy our statistic-addicted bean-counters. But moderate exercise, volumes of vegetables and psychological peace go a long way to avoiding pills and hospitals. **It might just be possible that other countries which spend less on healthcare but achieve better health outcomes do it through people moving more and eating smarter.**