



Most doctors do more than diagnose and treat specific medical problems. Many play another vital role by giving you advice on how to stay healthy. Eating the proper foods, getting sufficient exercise and avoiding bad habits are the cornerstones of that advice. You may not give it much thought, but many doctors take their own advice to heart.

For instance, when was the last time you saw a doctor smoking? Not smoking is the main reason doctors tend to live longer than most people. (A U.S. study indicated that male doctors live about three years longer than their counterparts in other professions.) It's not that doctors possess medical secrets; it's that they adopt healthier lifestyles.

A healthy medical profession can have important consequences both for patients and for the world we live in. Recently, the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) invited Dr. Erica Frank to make a presentation to its employees. Dr. Frank is a professor of preventive medicine at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and president of Physicians for Social Responsibility, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning organization dedicated to preventing nuclear war and countering the threats to the environment posed by global warming. She is also the lead investigator of a recent groundbreaking study on the health of Canadian physicians.

Dr. Frank pointed out that while doctors tend to be healthier than their peers in other professions, they could still improve their habits in the areas of diet and exercise.

Why is this important to you? According to Dr. Frank, several studies have shown that physicians



who stick to healthy personal habits are more likely to encourage their patients to do the same. For example, physicians who eat less fat are more likely to screen or counsel their patients about cholesterol. And those who exercise more are significantly more likely to counsel their patients about the need for physical activity.

It's not surprising that patients consider doctors with healthier diet and exercise habits more believable and more motivating when it comes to their promotion of a healthy diet

and regular exercise to their patients.

Dr. Frank then took this point a step further. From her perspective as the leader of an organization that tries to negate the harmful effects of global warming, she observed that the medical profession can play a key role in protecting the health of the planet. If doctors eat lower on the food chain — consuming less meat and thereby consuming fewer resources and causing less pollution — and if they walk or ride a bike instead of driving, they will do a more effective job of convincing their patients to do the same.

The message is clear. If doctors make better choices, they do a better job of keeping both you and the planet healthy. This is why the CMA feels it is so important not only to provide you with reliable information on health and nutrition in the pages of *Canadian Health* but also to encourage doctors to look after their personal health. When we do that, everybody benefits.

Dr. Robert Ouellet
President

Canadian Medical Association

Preaching what we practise: patients consider doctors with healthier diet and exercise habits more believable and motivating when it comes to their promotion of a healthy diet and regular exercise to their patients