INTRODUCTION

The Third International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health: Toronto, May 5–8, 2010

Peter T. Katzmarzyk

In 2006, the International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health was held in Atlanta, US, in recognition of the 10-year anniversary of the release of the U.S. Surgeon Generals’ report on Physical Activity and Health.1 The success of this initial congress was evident by the enthusiasm it generated among scientists and practitioners in attendance, and there was a desire to hold subsequent congresses on the topic. In 2008, the Second International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health was convened in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Advances in the field were again highlighted and it was evident that rapid progress was being made on many fronts, particularly in the areas of physical activity assessment, the recognition of sedentary behavior as a distinct risk behavior, as well as the role that various environments and policies play in shaping human behavior. These same issues were major themes at the Third International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health, held in Toronto, Canada, May 5–8, 2010.

We were privileged to have the Canadian team at the helm of the Third International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health. This group previously organized the 1988 and 1992 International Conferences on Physical Activity and Health,2-4 the 2000 Hockley Valley Physical Activity and Health Dose-Response Conference,5 the 2001 Whistler Conference on Communicating Physical Activity and Health Messages,6 and the 2007 International Conference on Physical Activity and Obesity in Children.7 The Congress Board, Scientific Program Committee, International Advisory Committee, and the Local Organizing Committee worked tirelessly for 2 years to plan this latest event, and their attention to detail was evident in the quality and success of the final product.

The Third International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health attracted more than 1200 delegates from 47 countries, which highlights the growing importance of physical activity as a major global public health issue. According to the World Health Organization, physical inactivity is the fourth leading cause of mortality worldwide, accounting for 5.5% of all deaths annually.8 The scientific program for the Toronto Congress was arranged under 4 main tracks: 1) physical activity and health, 2) surveillance and public policy, 3) physical activity interventions, and 4) community and public health promotion strategies. The scientific program was designed after extensive consultation with experts in the field, and there was an international call for symposia proposals and abstracts. The final program consisted of 6 pre-congress workshops, 5 keynote lectures, 28 symposia, 48 oral free communications, and 525 poster presentations. In addition, a well-attended post-congress workshop saw the launch of the revised Canadian pre-participation screening questionnaires, the PAR-Q and PARmed-X (now called the PAR-Q+ and the Online PARmed-X).

This special issue of the Journal of Physical Activity and Health is a legacy of the Third International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health. Three keynote lectures as well as summaries of all 28 symposia are contained in this volume. Further, the Toronto Charter for Physical Activity, which was presented and ratified in the final keynote session, is reproduced in its entirety in English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. The Charter is a call to action to improve opportunities for physical activity worldwide and is an advocacy tool to influence decision makers at national, regional, and local levels.

We live in exciting times, and the level of excitement in our field is palpable. People around the world are beginning to recognize the benefits of a physically active lifestyle, and our challenge now is to implement sustainable, cost-effective, evidence-based interventions to shift the physical activity level of the entire population upwards in every country.

Acknowledgments

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Katzmarzyk is Guest Editor of this special issue of the Journal of Physical Activity and Health. He is with Pennington Biomedical Research Center, Baton Rouge, LA, and is Chair of the Scientific Program Committee, Third International Congress on Physical Activity and Public Health.
References