©Journal of Sports Science and Medicine (2011) **10,** 232
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Letter to editor

Response to the study of Gómez-López et al. "*Perceived barriers by university students in the practice of physical activities. J Sport Sci & Med 9, 374-38, 2010*"

Dear Editor-in-Chief

The article by Manuel Gómez-López et al. (2010) was read with interest by student members of Cardiff University's newly formed Sports and Exercise Medicine Society. As medical students we, more than most, are aware of the long term effects that a sedentary lifestyle may bring and its impact on a healthcare system such as ours in the United Kingdom (UK).

We found the results of the study intriguing, particularly regarding the 'external barriers-lack of time' category as an important factor in not participating in sports. In the UK there is one afternoon every week which is set aside purely for sporting activities, providing the time to train and compete against other universities. Furthermore, UK universities on the whole offer more advanced and diverse facilities than those available to people at school, whilst there is also a greater number of sporting and exercise opportunities for people to partake in.

University is potentially one of the best times in life to expand one's horizons and spend time enjoying the various extra-curricular activities that there is on offer, hence it is crucial that any perceived barriers to this are broken down to allow implementation of a healthy routine. Physical activity has been shown to decrease psychosocial stress and cardiovascular mortality (Milani and Lavie, 2009), something that would surely be considered positive if a sedentary individual were contemplating regular exercise.

As future doctors we are concerned about an obesity epidemic that is only becoming more severe. Much of adult obesity has its roots in childhood (Sinha and Kling, 2009) and in modern times many children progress to university and further education. With students as the next generation of parents and working people, there should be a clear focus, especially across the developed world, on improving involvement in physical activities in the hope of decreasing prospective morbidity and the strain this brings to each nation's health service.

It is undisputed that a lot of time is required to meet educational requirements and academic deadlines, yet it is not immensely difficult for those with an interest in sport to also pursue these activities. Medicine is a demanding and time-consuming course, yet the majority of medical students in our year at Cardiff regularly participate in sports, many of us acquiring important roles within the clubs whilst competing to high standards.

We believe that students in the UK who have adopted an inactive way of life may be influenced by intrinsic factors, such as those mentioned within the article, to a greater extent than proposed. It would be easy for people to blame extrinsic factors in this questionnaire to hide their own lack of motivation. Although these intrinsic traits cannot truly be altered, educational institutes should commit to provide the facilities and spare time for sport amongst this age group, therefore partially reducing the hindrance of any external factors.

The important observations made by Gómez-López et al. should not be taken for granted; it is crucial that a healthy lifestyle is promoted from an early age to maintain a good level of physical and mental health. Universities have a duty to their students whereby they should remove any barriers preventing students from practicing their chosen activity. In the future we hope that participation levels will continue to rise, bringing with it all the associated benefits.

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Received: 06 January 2011 / Accepted: 06 January 2011 / Published (online): 01 March 2011