If jogging is a joke, who should have the last laugh?

It was the end of my sabbatical in Canada, and I was strolling around Stanley Park, one of the many jewels of Vancouver British Columbia. I was just finishing a four month trip in Australia and Canada studying educational methods used to teach general practitioners. OK I’ll come clean—I was having an “extended holiday with a purpose”. On this beautiful autumnal Sunday, the air was crisp and, as the sun sparkled on Burrard Inlet, the colours of the spruce, maple, and arbutus painted the lower slopes of the snow clad peaks across the bay. “No wonder this is one of the most popular places to live in our world” I thought.

Despite this idyll most of the people I saw that day looked ill at ease, in pain even. Why? I hear you ask. The answer is obvious: they were jogging! Why is an activity that looks ill at ease, in pain even. Why? I hear you ask. The answer is obvious: they were jogging! Why is an activity that at least it is good for them I thought. If jogging is a joke, who should have the last laugh?

Now—anyone fancy a nice walk?

P I MIDDLETON
The Caxton Surgery, Oswestry, Shropshire

Encouraging stair walking

A motivational poster placed at a choice point between escalator and stair use, in a city centre underground station, doubled stair use (fig 1). The study also showed that men and boys used the stairs more than women and girls both before and after the poster intervention, but there was no obvious explanation of this finding. Follow up interviews with 200 stair users or escalator users showed that motivational posters can change the behaviour of people who are not very active as not all those using the stairs were regularly active. The barriers to stair use were time, laziness, and effort, while the motivations for stair use were saving time and improving health. Women cited laziness as the key barrier to stair climbing and in comparison with men perceived stair climbing as requiring more effort.

The study results led to the design and distribution of stair walking promotional posters throughout Scottish workplaces by the Health Education Board for Scotland. Within Glasgow a new promotional campaign was developed using life size cut out cartoon characters placed at the foot of escalators, as posters on platforms, and as advertising cards on trains (fig 2). These materials encouraged stair use and had straplines explaining the health benefits of small amounts of physical activity. The campaign has run for two 12-week periods in all Glasgow underground venues. Several other studies have shown the efficacy of motivational signs promoting stair use.

NANETTE MUTRIE
Centre for Exercise Science and Medicine, University of Glasgow

AVRIL BLAMEY
Health Promotion Department, Greater Glasgow Health Board, Scotland