

He has pioneered research into corporate health and fitness, now he is putting his wellness concept into practice at the UK offices of adidas. Catherine Larner reports

dorian dugmore

"There's a story of a cardiologist walking on the river bank," says Dr Dorian Dugmore. "He sees someone in the river drowning. Quickly, he dives in and saves them, bringing them back to shore. No sooner has he done it than he sees someone else in the river drowning, so he does the same again. It happens again and again.

"The cardiologist sits on the bank exhausted when a passerby comes up to him and commends him for what he has done. You've saved four people's lives - that's fantastic. But can I give you a tip? Why don't you go round the corner and see who's pushing them in?"

"That's what we are doing," says Dugmore. "We are spending much of our time downstream, diving in, dealing with crises, often in the form of heart attacks. It is equally important to go upstream and find preventative strategies that work."

Dugmore knows what he is talking about. He has spent 25 years seeing the effects of heart disease in his work in cardiac rehabilitation in Dudley, England and Toronto, Canada. He sits on committees around the world steering coronary prevention and rehabilitation. He has launched a national charity, Action Heart, and is a director of the international charity, Heart Friends Around the World. He has won numerous awards for his work and regularly speaks at conventions worldwide. Recently the fitness industry learned of his work through his presentations at FIA and IHRSA events.

Yet talking to Dugmore is at first disconcerting. Tracksuited with bold, gold jewellery and a strong Birmingham accent, he looks and sounds more like the football coach he once was than the respected academic, but his passion and authority on wellness soon become an inspiring and mesmerising subject. "For want of a better phrase, I walk the talk," he says. "I believe sincerely in what can happen."

And, after a career spent trying to convince people about the potential of his vision, he has

at last been given a chance to put it into practice. The adidas Wellness Centre will be officially launched this summer.

Some two years in the making, it has involved the transformation of a dark, tired, ill-frequented gym on the third floor of the company's headquarters in Stockport, into a collection of interlinking rooms boasting piped music, plants and pastel shades where employees can seek advice and counselling on nutrition, stress management, smoking cessation, relaxation and, of course, exercise.

"They are not coming into an exercise area," says Dugmore. "They are coming into a concept; it has no start and finish point. It is an experience where they can take what they want from it. We want them to see results so that they will come back for more, but we will let them be the instigators."

The concept was initiated by the two MDs at adidas and they have ensured the whole company is integrated into the system.

"Part of the wellness concept is involving the whole company - human resources, the restaurant, department managers. It is a very integrated approach," says Dugmore. "We have gone through a well documented series of steps to work with the people in the company, asking them to identify their main health concerns. We conducted a lot of focus group interviews to gain a clear impression of what they saw as their key needs and we have established a Wellness Committee to ensure we continue to meet the needs of the workforce.

"Like anywhere else these are to reduce cardiovascular risk and cancer risk, weight control, stopping smoking, getting healthier and fitter, and to reduce stress.

"People respond to being involved in decision making. Our approach is very client centred, encouraging the individual to focus on their needs."

Dugmore's team has been trained in the key principles of behavioural counselling and combine this with more traditional health assessments. "This has been a problem in medicine for too long," he says. "People have talked from behind a desk - do this, do that - and sometimes it doesn't work. Our approach is

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simple; to work with them, not talk at them."

Some 280 employees have so far tried the centre, which is a 60 per cent take up rate. In most facilities 15-20 per cent is the norm, says Dugmore. "People have said how motivated they have been seeing one of their colleagues taking part," he says. "We are taking the senior managers onto the programme and getting them to lead by example. The concept is coming from the top down and percolating through everything. It is a great way of getting the culture embedded into the company."

Employees wanting to get on board are initially taken through a series of lifestyle evaluations using one of five PCs in the centre. Through the Health Checkpoint and Fitech software, a comprehensive picture of each employee is established. This is supported by a highly advanced exercise testing laboratory, equipped by Cardiokinetics. It uses a Technogym Bikerace and Runrace linked to Medgraphics ECG testing package. And there is a gym with cv and resistance equipment running the Technogym computerised monitoring system which allows each employee to track their own progress on a regular basis. Also an integral part of the Wellness Centre, is the company restaurant which helps run lifestyle promotions and the subsidised meals have their calorie and fat contents clearly displayed.

"There has been a substantial cost involved in setting this up," says Dugmore, "but we are hoping it will give a return in terms of reduced absenteeism and other corporate markers."

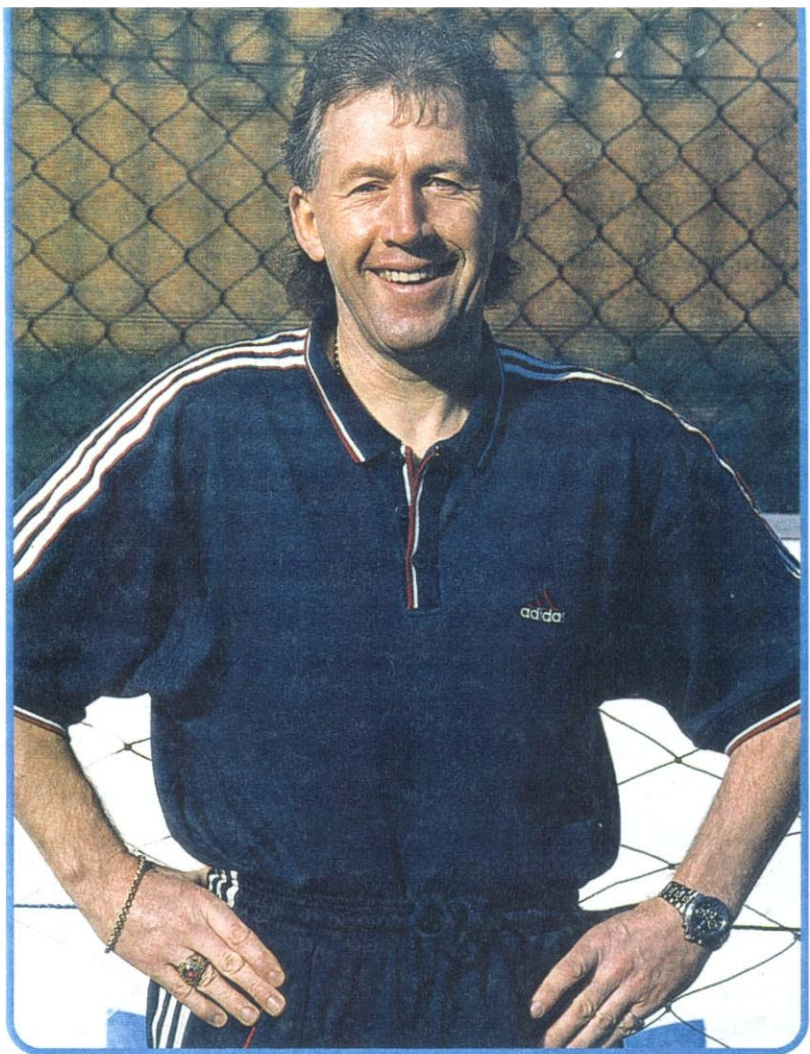
Dugmore will be collating all the findings of the initiative in the hope of giving the corporate world statistical evidence of the benefits of a fit and healthy workforce. "We are in place to collect the information, but more important is the creation of a company culture shared by everyone, that moves towards the goal of healthier and fitter employees."

We can quote all the statistics we like from international research, Dugmore says, but change will only happen if findings are home grown and when best practice is, in this case, a British product.

"The same happened to me in cardiac rehabilitation. I told people until I was blue in the face that in the States survival rates after cardiac rehabilitation are better, life after cardiac rehabilitation is better, that there are tremendous benefits, but it didn't take off until I proved it on my own soil. You have to say 'here's the model, this is how we apply it, it works, these are the results' and then people start to believe it.

"Clinical trials have proven that by getting people to change their nutritional habits, reduce their cholesterol, take moderate activity, you can reduce cardiac risk by up to 40 per cent. We've got to look at what will work in the adidas setting and achieve a model of preventative practice that is attainable.

"Although the challenge is hard, and we are saving people from something they might or might not get, the impact could be phenome-



nal. That's what motivates me. If we can be successful, the impact of making people's lives better is beyond my wildest expectations."

Dugmore set up the Wellness Coach company to carry out this work for adidas. His team of healthcare professionals from Australia, Canada, United States and England, are contracted on an exclusive basis to run the project.

"adidas has always been very interested in my work," says Dugmore. "Years ago I did some fitness testing for them at the London Marathon. When I formed the charity Action Heart, adidas adopted it, and they sponsored my doctoral research in cardiovascular medicine."

It was natural, then, that Dugmore should work with adidas in furthering his research in health and fitness in the corporate environment. He had been working as the programme director for the world famous Toronto Rehabilitation Centre since the early 1990s and from 1995 as the director of cardiac rehabilitation and wellness for International Managed Healthcare, a subsidiary of Liberty Health, Canada. It was during his work with the Liberty group that he achieved some stunning results through making lifestyle interventions in a group of CEOs in Toronto.

The research was called Project LIFE, stand-

Dugmore's work at the adidas Wellness Centre was recently featured on a BBC *Tomorrow's World* programme

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profile

ing for Lifestyle Interventions for Executives, and came about through a chance conversation at The Executive Committee (TEC). This is a worldwide organisation of company CEOs who, in groups of 15, meet each month to listen to a speaker and trouble shoot each other's problems. Dugmore belonged to a Toronto group.

"I realised a lot of these individuals were very sensitised to looking after themselves and they were of an age when they realised they were no longer immortal and could easily be susceptible to heart disease. I felt we ought to do something and decided to start a pilot project on our group of 15 CEOs."

However, other TEC groups wanted to join in. Ultimately 70 CEOs became involved. Over an initial two to three month period, they each underwent a comprehensive medical and lifestyle assessment to develop profiles of their cardio-respiratory condition, nutritional habits and body composition. The CEOs then took part in a six to eight month intervention and were reassessed over a further two to three month period at the end of the project. Throughout, they were under the supervision of lifestyle coaches who monitored and tailored programmes to suit each individual.

"The basis was that if I could prove to them the benefits of making changes in lifestyle, reducing cardiac risk and becoming fitter, they would influence their own companies. Forget the VPs of human resources, if you reach the CEO things will happen."

Dugmore has some stunning stories to tell as a result of this work. All the individuals, albeit at different stages and commitments within the programme, became converts for a healthier lifestyle and were evangelistic in their zeal to share their experiences. "A lot of them started to do what I had asked them to do individually, then got the people in their company to do it too."

"One guy said he wasn't going to follow our programme," says Dugmore, "he said he wasn't an exerciser and would certainly never wear a tracksuit. After a long counselling session with him and his wife he said he would get his wife to drop him off near to his office 15 minutes early and he would walk to work, and she would pick him up in the same place in the evening."

"The 15 minutes became 20 then 30 minutes. He built a shower in his office, then showers for his staff who were doing the same thing. He was walking an hour, hour and a half a day. When he came to see me for his final counselling session he was

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wearing a tracksuit for the first time and he said he was wearing it as testimony that I had changed his life.

"One man used to go walking in his lunchtimes. Other members of his workforce started to do it and before he knew it he had a walking club. He gave people time to exercise during working hours and, to people's amazement, productivity went up because people were so positive about working for him."

"Another company introduced callisthenics exercises on the work floor, for five minutes every hour. When the CEO told the group about it, everyone laughed.

Don't laugh, he said, productivity has gone up by a third.

"There are lots of stories where they had taken initiatives for their own setting," says Dugmore. "They wanted their employees to feel the benefit too. And, of course, it is more effective to lead by example. If something is close to your heart and you are fully involved, people will buy into it."

Dugmore hopes to use the Project LIFE template in monitoring adidas employees. He also has data on 14 groups of CEOs in Australia, where he recently completed a lecture tour, and on 500 CEOs in the UK and Canada. Financial backing may soon be forthcoming in supporting his research on this larger group.

"I am sure it will happen, it is just a question of when," he says. "The corporate world has so much potential to influence people's lives because that is where you spend so much of your time. If we can get Project LIFE to demonstrate how effective it can be then I am sure the impact could be phenomenal."

Government health awareness campaigns are good, he says, but if the corporate world gets behind something like this then things will happen very quickly. "A lot of work has been cosmetic," he says. "It is one thing to make people aware but another to make them change their behaviour."

"We want people to do it for themselves and their families. Heart attack patients may have been smokers all their lives, but suddenly they experience a heart attack and they stop smoking overnight. On the preventative side, that trauma hasn't happened so the approach is more subtle. We have to create the urgency, the need to take action before the trauma happens. That is always going to be harder but the rewards are significant." ●

Catherine Larner is editor of Health Club Management