

TAKING TIME OUT

Australia's traditional time-out is almost over. Time devoted to surfing, sport or simply slumbering revitalises and rejuvenates us for the year ahead. For our profession, this time is a respite — a time to forget juggling personal and professional priorities, to leave behind the pressures to perform, counsel and cure. For many, it is a time to put life's difficulties in proper perspective.

But, inevitably, we return to a lifestyle epitomised by the call of the Olympic motto: Faster! Longer! Higher! In her essay *Time out*, Miriam Feldman comments on this phenomenon, and depicts current professional commitments as leaving "insufficient time and energy for personal growth, professional development, family involvement or avocations... with a [resulting] sense of tedium, of stagnation and of being on a treadmill." Ultimately, this compulsive striving leads to despair and despondency.

What can be done? Most experts in lifestyle management advise adopting a healthy philosophical outlook on life; spending time with friends and family; maintaining professional satisfaction through realistic values and choices; and setting limits by saying "No" more often and reining in oppressive workloads.

Most importantly, the secret is to not wait for vacations, but to create regular "time-outs", away from phones, beepers and laptops. Taking time for solitude and reflection, for regular exercise, for networking and developing interests beyond medicine is crucial to our emotional well-being. Time-out creates both personal harmony and a more dynamic professional life.

Remember the words of Peter Lynch, one of the great fund managers of Wall Street, who claimed "Nobody on his deathbed ever said, 'I wish I'd spent more time at the office'."

Martin B Van Der Weyden

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