

(Editor's note: We take great pride in presenting op-ed pieces written by members of the first graduating class of RNs from the Bachelor of Science Nursing program run by Algonquin College and the University of Ottawa - thus the column's name, "First Class Nursing." The columns will explore health and lifestyle opportunities from a fresh perspective. We hope you enjoy them!)



Wii for the Entire Family

Special to the Observer by Erin Brine

The Nintendo Wii is the first mainstream home gaming system that is getting the entire family up and moving. There is no question that some activity is better than none at all and with high rates of a sedentary lifestyle locally and provincially for people of all ages the Wii gives us a boost.

The Wii has been getting slammed by some authors who suggest that it has little effect on physical well being and burns minimal calories. When compared to full activity sports or playing regular video games it proves to be

closer to the latter. However, the Wii gets the player up and moving limbs and twisting the core which is inarguably better than melting into the sofa or computer chair. The Wii has not been marketed as the answer to the obesity crisis nor is it a substitute for regular physical exercise. It is an entertainment tool that requires more activity than blinking our eyes and flexing and extending our digits.

The marketing for the Wii does boast that it is an activity the entire family can do and do together. Several games are geared towards a team or competing against one another. This is an excellent way for families in our area to get that extra bit of activity during those -30°C evenings during the long winter months. The social aspect of the Wii is what I think could have the greatest benefits for us all. I have seen a 6 year old boy strike out his grandmother in baseball, and in the month of December! What a way to get the family laughing!

Some seniors' residences have latched onto the Wii and have the residents bowling, playing tennis, dancing and I am sure they are participating in other sports and games as well. With a lack of public transportation and the dangers of icy sidewalks, the Wii may be one part of a solution to better physical activity rates and easier access for seniors.

Media coverage of the Wii has included reports of sore joints and limbs after hours of playing time. This has led some to believe that the games are causing harm. At this time there needs to be further study on the exact effect. However, this should not discourage people from playing. It is natural that repetitive motion that is not regular will cause pain the following day. What is important is that playing is treated like other physical activity with stretching and warming up before and stretching and cooling down after.

Playing the same game and doing the same movements for an extended period of time could cause damage and a lot of pain just the same as any other activity. The same principles apply for safety. It is dangerous in regular sports to not wear proper equipment. For example, when playing the Wii it would be dangerous for a senior who has lost some balance control to play the games that require footwork without proper shoes on.

Above all, the most positive health effect the Nintendo Wii may bring is that it is fun for the family to share together. Get your regular exercise and on a cold stormy night with no hopes of going outside, add to it by putting on your tennis shoes and challenging the family to a match. You may just find out that Grandma has a killer serve.