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Making rounds: docs tour for cure against diabetes

Special to The Chronicle

Dr. Bob Schwartz started cycling to work on the hilly roads of Pittsburgh at age 49. "It was my mid-life crisis, and I thought I deserved a sports car," he says. "But with four kids in private schools, I headed to the bike store — not the car dealer."

Once he had enough training miles logged, he celebrated his 50th birthday with a 50-mile route with good friends. Surviving this, he vowed to add one mile to his longest ride each year thereafter.

"That way," he says, tongue-in-cheek, "by the time I'm 100 I can look forward to doing a century." Dr. Schwartz has revisited his philosophy and plans to add more than one mile a year these days. And now he's so interested in cycling that he's decided to do it for a cause.

Schwartz, a clinical psychologist affiliated with UPMC Health System and founder of Cognitive Dynamic Therapy Associates, has stepped forward to captain a UPMC bicycle team to raise funds to combat health problems. The team will initially raise money for the American Diabetes Association's (ADA) Tour de Cure, which will take place on June 4.

"I like the idea of competing as part of a team and I want to give something back to the community," Schwartz explains.

Schwartz rode the Tour de Cure last year with eight of his friends. Together with co-captain Dr. Barry Segal, his group raised approximately \$2,000, finishing second behind the winning team, which raised \$7,500.

Segal says his relationship with Dr. Schwartz began years ago on a professional level and has grown into a competitive but good-natured friendship.

"We spur each other on toward shared goals," he says, describing the camaraderie that attracts other Squirrel Hill physicians as well. "Bob is very good at



Photo courtesy Dr. Robert Schwartz

Dr. Barry Segal, left, co-captain, and Dr. Robert Schwartz, captain of the UPMC Bicycle Team, prepare to pedal against diabetes.

staying in touch with our cycling group, encouraging us just to get out and ride, then to raise donations for charity," he explains.

As to the charitable connection, he says, "I can go out and ride any time I want. But events like Tour de Cure give me several goals: to complete the distance, to raise money for charity (and we

certainly need to find a cure for diabetes), and to enlist other cyclists who think they can do this too." His family medicine practice has a natural fundraising connection with pharmaceutical salesmen.

"The drug companies are usually receptive to donating to charitable causes.

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Rounds: Docs pedal against diabetes

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You just have to ask," Dr. Segal explains.

Dr. Ya'akov Abrams started cycling as a teenager and has been riding steadily for the past 30 years. "Originally I rode because I couldn't stand waiting idly for the school bus," he says. Now he rides to work every day, a short commute from his Squirrel Hill home to hospital rounds in Oakland or teaching assignments in Lawrenceville.

He rides rain or shine, for pleasure, for exercise, and to curb his reliance on fossil fuel. In fact, he rides nearly everywhere he needs to go. He decided to join in raising money for the ADA's Tour de Cure one recent Sunday morning, after a spirited training ride with other UPMC bike team members.

"Bob had been gently 'harassing' me for two years to join his effort," says Dr. Abrams. "I guess the camaraderie got to me. We all have too many commitments on our time. So we prioritize. There are some things you lead, and some things you follow. This time, I will gladly follow, since I love to ride."

All bicycle wheels are round, but not all bikes look alike. Dr. Zarky Rudavsky, OD, makes a habit these days of cruising the streets sitting down, leaning back, legs outstretched in front of him—on a recumbent bicycle.

"The bike is a conversation starter, an oddity," he says. "People don't notice me when I ride my upright bike, but they talk to me when I'm out on the recumbent." He now takes hills with ease, even though getting used to the bike was a bit hard. He rides to relax, get rid of stress, and keep in shape. But this June 4, he is most importantly riding in memory of friend Judy Leff who died from diabetic complications.

A few years ago when the Tour de

Cure was in its initial year, Dr. Rudavsky approached a fellow cyclist on a Saturday and asked him to join him in a charity bike ride.

"Tomorrow, Zarky said - not much time to train!" says Dr. Paul Rosenberg. "We paid the minimum contribution and had a good time riding the Tour. The next year, I wanted a way to do more."

Rosenburg, a Squirrel Hill ophthalmologist, has many patients whose diabetes has compromised their eyesight. "I see every day what this disease can do. Lots of physicians do charitable work, but I wanted to partner with my patients to make a difference," he says.

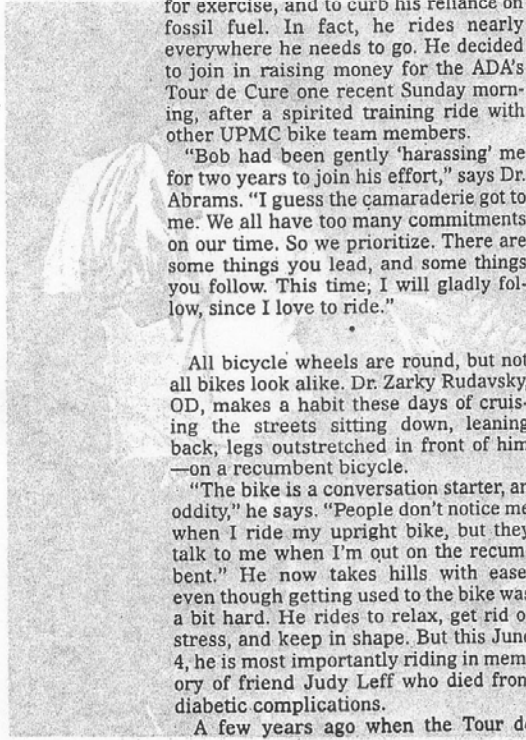
Dr. Rosenberg felt uncomfortable directly asking patients for money, so he and a colleague designed a campaign where patients could contribute funds to the office staff and he would match their dollars.

Posters and "prescription pledge pads" marketed the campaign in the waiting and exam rooms. His practice contributed \$1,400 to the American Diabetes Association that year.

Although he won't be bicycling in the Tour de Cure this year, the ophthalmologist will still be working toward finding a cure for diabetes participating in the "Team Diabetes" marathon in Hawaii. He hopes to raise \$15,000 through personal and corporate sponsors. The Tour de Cure bicycle event has four rides that use portions of the same route (32, 60, 72, and 100 miles) and takes place Sunday, June 4. All routes provide ample food, rest stops, entertainment, and support.

It begins at La Roche College in the North Hills and wanders the back roads in the valley along the Pennsylvania Turnpike, through Cranberry Township, Evans City, Zelenople, Ellwood City, Enon Valley, Rochester, Brush Creek, and Warrendale.

For more information, call 1-800-868-7888.



Dr. Zarky Rudavsky, OD, makes a habit these days of cruising the streets sitting down, leaning back, legs outstretched in front of him—on a recumbent bicycle. Photo by [unreadable]

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