

Runner's heart not immune

Not long ago I overheard a conversation among several long-distance runners. They were discussing a fellow distance runner, in his early 50s, who had died suddenly of a heart attack during a 10-mile run.

"It's hard to believe," one individual said, noting that the runner had completed a 26-mile marathon just two weeks prior to his death.

"He was in excellent physical condition, very lean, never smoked," commented another.

SUCH REACTIONS are not surprising. Since most of us associate physical fitness with good health, the untimely death of an exercise enthusiast always seems particularly perplexing.

Previous scientific reports documenting the outstanding cardiovascular fitness of distance runners have led to speculation that distance running may confer "absolute" protection from heart disease.

Marathon running, in particular, has achieved a cardiovascular mystique perpetuated by the provocative statement of a California pathologist that "no active marathoner has ever died of a heart attack."

Indeed, several running magazines and associations have picked up on and promoted this hypothesis.

UNFORTUNATELY, the medical literature

and reports in the lay press have demonstrated the "exercise and immunity" theory to be incorrect.

Researchers in South Africa have published unequivocal scientific evidence of heart disease in some marathon runners. Furthermore, recent reports indicate that heart disease appears to be the major killer of conditioned runners who die while running.

A Farmington Hills resident, Barry Franklin is co-director of cardiac rehabilitation at Sinai Hospital and on the medical faculty of Wayne State University.



Do tax breaks create jobs?

Even as Gov. James Blanchard signed a bill to extend Michigan's property tax abatement law, state legislators are questioning whether the program is really generating new jobs and attracting new investment.

Blanchard last week approved the extension of the Act 255, which allows local governments to grant tax abatements to commercial enterprises to promote economic development. The law was scheduled to expire Dec. 31.

The law allows for a specified company to get a break of up to 50 percent of property taxes for up to 12 years if it rehabilitates obsolete commercial facilities or builds new facilities in previously developed areas.

BUT THE WHOLE issue of providing this and other tax abatements has come under question, and a committee within the state House is looking for some answers, said Rep. Gerald Law, R-Plymouth, a freshman lawmaker and co-sponsor of the extension legislation.

The eight-member committee is composed of members from the Urban Affairs Committee and the Taxation Committee. It was formed about three months ago because Act 255, also known as the Commercial Redevelopment Act, was going to expire.

There was "a question of whether or not to renew it," Law said. "People were concerned with the number of abatements given out."

"We will find out whether or not these abatements have helped in the expansion of business and the retention and addition of new jobs in Michigan," he said, adding no records exist now of the success rate of the abatements.

LAW SAID the committee already has met with representatives from each of the departments in the state. It is asking how effective are current tax abatement programs.

"We'd go in and ask: Has it created new jobs? Have we actually retained jobs that would have left the state? And how much is it costing? They couldn't answer that," he said.

One question that has arisen is what criteria are used to determine whether a company or business which applies for a tax abatement will receive it, Law said. Sometimes, he suggested, abatements may be given out too freely.

"We've had places like McDonald's and K mart receiving tax abatements," he said. "They never build a store in an area that can't support the investment."

LAW SAID he was not "knocking" either company, but added they would build their businesses with or without the tax break.

"They do an expert study. They know exactly where to build," he said.

Some businesses in the area were at a "break-even" point and did need the tax abatement, he said. But others listed many factors ahead of property tax abatements as reasons for locating in an area.

"For some businesses that applied for it, tax abatement was 15th on their list," he said, "and they got it."

Law said the abatements now are costing the state about \$150 million through the school-aid formula. The state general fund makes up some of the property taxes lost due to tax abatements.

ANOTHER QUESTION is whether tax abatements actually are creating more jobs in Michigan. Law said, "The question being asked is, 'Are we, in fact, just shifting jobs from one area to another?'"



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