



Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada

Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada

*...from the
director's chair*

Preventive Maintenance

Many drivers take better care of their trucks than their own bodies. Maybe we need to rearrange our priorities?

Most of us could be accused of taking our health more or less for granted. We work a little too hard and probably don't get as much sleep as we need. We eat too much of the wrong kind of food, and gauging by the size of the T-shirts I've been selling lately, it's pretty obvious that we don't get as much exercise as we should.

I say we, because I'm as guilty as any of you. I work into the wee hours of the morning, then get up to join the rest of the world for the start of the business day. I seldom eat a proper breakfast, and I certainly don't exercise as much as I should. And my excuses are pretty weak: I can't spare the time, the gym is closed...

So, my jeans are getting tighter, and I often need an afternoon nap to help pay down some of my sleep debt. No big deal, right? Well, I can tell you that the older I get, the bigger deal it becomes. As we age, the impact of an unhealthy lifestyle is more likely to manifest itself in something worse than an expanding waistline, afternoon drowsiness, or aches and pains that we never used to have.

I was reminded of our relative frailty recently when I got involved in the Convoy for a Cure, the first all-woman truck convoy which, incidentally, raised \$15,000 for the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation during breast cancer awareness month. I know many women who have battled breast cancer, some successfully, some not. In fact, the day of the convoy was the anniversary of the day my mother lost her life to the disease.

I felt it was important for OBAC to get involved in this awareness-raising effort not only because breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in Canada – men

can contract breast cancer too – but because the convoy spoke to the need for all of us to do a better job of looking after ourselves.

OBAC sponsored a post-convoy speaker who shared her own story of survival. Anna Capobianco-Skipworth of Montreal, who endured two mastectomies and lost both her ovaries to cancer over a 13-month period, moved the crowd to laughter and to tears as she took us on a journey from the discovery of a lump, through fear, denial, hope, and finally triumph. As a survivor, Anna works to promote breast health and to encourage wellness and healthy lifestyle choices.

Anna's story left me thinking about all the things drivers can do to decrease the risk of going down the same path. The sedentary life of an over-the-road driver is a litany of compromises in diet and sleep routines, and some downright bad habits.

Professional drivers are at a higher risk than the general population for things like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, sleep apnea, and a variety of musculoskeletal ailments, many of which can be traced back to the difficult and unhealthy lifestyle that is trucking.

But like Anna's breast cancer, and so many other nasty diseases and conditions, early detection greatly increases the chances of successful treatment and even survival.

It's all well and good to talk of improving lifestyle, but the challenges of keeping well on the road are significant. Don't get me going on adequate rest and exercise or improving nutrition on the road – that's a column in itself – just think about regular PM medical exams. Scheduling doctors' appointments around limited and unpredictable home time is difficult, and arranging medical visits on the road is almost impossible.

Which is why I love Bob Lodge, owner of



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the 730 Truck Stop in Cardinal, Ont. Thanks to his lobbying efforts and an arrangement with a Community and Primary Health Care team out of nearby Brockville, an RV full of medical expertise sets up shop in his parking lot once a month to dole out medical help and advice to visiting truckers.

The mobile health unit, which is the only one I know of in Canada, offers basic checkups that could detect early signs of high blood pressure and diabetes. The clinic also does immunization and blood work and dispenses prescriptions, if necessary. The unit has been in operation for about a year and has recently extended its service to include evening visits.

South of the border, long-time truckers' health advocate Dr. John McElligott and his supporters founded the Professional Drivers Medical Depot (PDMD) and opened the first clinic in Knoxville, Tenn. almost two years ago. There are now a half-dozen PDMD facilities at truck stops in the US with plans to build a nationwide network of walk-in health care facilities geared to meet the needs of professional drivers on the road.

What trucking needs is more folks like Bob Lodge and Dr. John, and we need more truckers to start thinking of regular medical checkups as the kind of insurance you can't live without. When was the last time you paid a visit to your doctor? I don't want a confession here, just a promise that you'll make it a priority.