

# In Practice's Losing Race, Good Health Is a Winner

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Faced with 15%-18% average yearly increases in the health insurance premiums he pays for his staff, Dr. John K. Randall decided to do something about it.

He staged a weight loss contest, loosely modeled after the fitness reality television show, "The Biggest Loser." Fourteen employees who elected to participate ponied up a \$20 entrance fee each and were weighed on Feb. 4, 2008, and again on June 4, 2008—the end of the competition. Dr. Randall added \$500 to sweeten the pot.

Karen Cooper, a receptionist at Randall Dermatology's Kokomo, Ind., office, earned the \$780 prize and the designation of the practice's "Biggest Loser" by shedding 33 pounds and dropping her body mass index from 36 kg/m<sup>2</sup> to 30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>.

The runners-up shed 19 and 17 pounds, respectively.

"Happy employees and those who are motivated to promote your practice go a long way in making you successful," said Dr. Randall, who employs 40 people in five main offices and seven satellite offices in Indiana. "The health part of that is very important. Getting people healthier will end up costing me less money in the long run."

Dr. Randall noted that a sense of solidarity developed among the contestants. "A lot of people were involved, and they had something in common," he said. "Almost half of the employees were working toward a similar goal, so I think it made a difference in a positive way. It wasn't cut-throat competition."

Some of the contestants used a dedicated workout room that was added to Randall Dermatology's West Lafayette location during a recent renovation. It contains state-of-the-art fitness equipment and is open to all employees. As an additional incentive during the contest period, Dr. Randall paid the registration fee for employees to participate in a 5K run that supported the local March of Dimes.

"That encouraged them to show up and to train for a little bit of running," he said.

Dr. Randall said that keeping the weight loss contest simple made it successful. "Don't require people to come in every week and keep a log of what they're eating or how much they're exercising," he advised. "Pick out a specific amount of time so people have a goal. I think at least 3 months, but up to 6 months would be reasonable."

When the winner of Dr. Randall's weight loss competition learned about the contest, she signed up right away.

"I needed to lose the weight," Ms. Cooper said. "I figured this was as good a time as any to get started. Competition is good."

Ms. Cooper credits her achievement to carefully watching her caloric intake and taking brisk walks.

"My daughter is a dietician and the first thing she said was, 'Mom, calories count. It doesn't matter if a food is fat free or not. You've got to watch the intake.'"

"So I counted my calories and exer-

cised. I tried to make it vigorous."

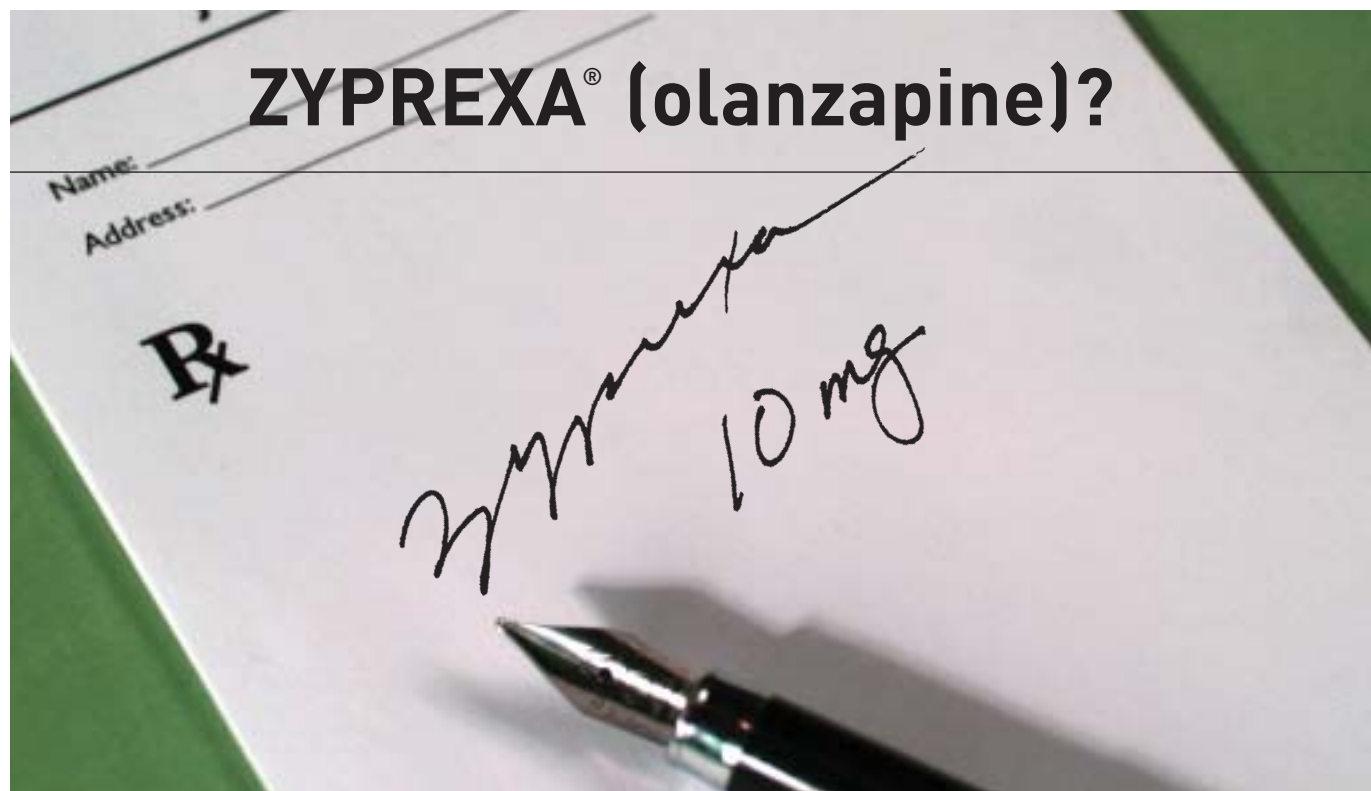
During a visit to her physician after the contest ended, Ms. Cooper said she learned that her triglyceride levels were "awesome."

"My numbers have always been really high," she said. "We have heart disease in my family, and my numbers were right in the normal range. My doctor was thrilled." ■



Dr. John K. Randall, shown here with "Biggest Loser" Karen Cooper (left) and contest runner-up Lara Rogers, added a workout facility to his dermatology practice.

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