

From the Washington Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/washington/blog/2013/07/in-the-spotlight-neil-gordon-medical-dir.html>

In the Spotlight: Neil Gordon, medical director, Wellness Corporate Solutions

Jul 12, 2013, 5:00am EDT Updated: Jul 12, 2013, 10:36am EDT

This week's edition of "In the Spotlight" features Dr. Neil Gordon, medical director of Wellness Corporate Solutions LLC.

Gordon is also CEO of Intervent International LLC, a population health management company.

Want to be considered for a future "In the Spotlight" feature? Submit your announcements here or email nduhring@bizjournals.com.

And be sure to check out People on the Move for information on who's moving where in the Washington-area business community.

What's the biggest challenge you face day-to-day? Keeping up to date with the latest research in the field of disease prevention and management. The field is evolving at an astronomical pace, and new studies are constantly being published.

What businessperson, living or past, would you most like to have dinner with? And what one question would you ask? While at high school in Johannesburg, South Africa, I was an avid middle-distance runner. Ivan Glasenberg was a training partner of mine for several years. Ivan went on to become a multibillionaire and the CEO of Glencore Xstrata, one of the world's largest commodity trading and mining companies. My understanding is that he has continued to lead a physically active lifestyle despite his hectic work and travel schedule. The question I would ask Ivan is how he has managed to accomplish this feat and what tips he has for the average person who believes there is not enough time in the day to lead a healthy lifestyle.

What's one thing you wish everyone knew about your job? That it is both an extremely challenging and rewarding job. It is extremely challenging in that we live in an "obesogenic" environment that is not conducive to healthy living, and therefore it is very hard to get people to make and adhere to meaningful lifestyle changes. It is also extremely rewarding in that even small changes in a person's lifestyle can have profound health benefits. My ambition in life since I went to medical school has been to improve the health and well-being of as many people as possible. To date, over 1.5 million individuals have participated in health promotion programs I helped create – so, fortunately, my work has been an immensely gratifying experience.



Neil Gordon

Your most unhealthy habit: I don't drink coffee or tea – not for health reasons but simply because I don't particularly like their taste. However, I typically do have a 12-ounce caffeinated diet soda before 10 a.m. on most mornings and at least one more, later in the day.

How has working in the wellness industry affects your personal habits? It has definitely helped me stay on track over the years with my own lifestyle and personal habits. There are two major reasons for this. Firstly, I constantly strive to practice what I preach. Secondly, since 1997 I have personally participated in the lifestyle health coaching program that I helped develop. The health coaches I have interacted with over the years have played an important role in helping me hold myself accountable for my actions. Most recently, for example, my personal health coach was responsible for motivating me to get the colonoscopy that I had been constantly delaying. Fortunately, it was normal.

Biggest pet peeve: As a nation, we spend an immense amount of time, energy and money treating chronic diseases, which in many instances are potentially preventable. A pet peeve of mine is that health insurers will provide reimbursement for medication and surgery to treat chronic diseases but, in most instances, will not provide reimbursement for clinically effective lifestyle interventions, such as telephonic health coaching to help people with exercise training, nutrition, weight management, tobacco cessation, etc.

Best lesson you ever learned from a mentor: When you believe you are on the correct path, stay focused and be patient and persistent. I first learned this lesson while doing karate (I obtained my second-degree black belt at the age of 23) under the tutelage of the legendary Sensei Stan Schmidt. This lesson was later reinforced while working with Dr. Ken Cooper, the “father” of aerobics, in Dallas, Texas, in the late 1980s/early 1990s and again in early 2000 by my good friend and business partner, Hal Wright (founder of the Extended Stay America hotel company).

What keeps you up at night? I actually sleep very well. However, on the very rare occasion that I am unable to sleep, it is in connection with thinking about novel and more effective ways of getting far greater numbers of individuals to change their risky behaviors. Despite everything we have learned in recent decades about the risks of an unhealthy lifestyle and the behavior modification process, the sad truth is that very few adult Americans (some studies suggest less than 5 percent) actually lead a healthy lifestyle. What's great about working at both is that the company takes a proactive approach in helping various companies and their employees modify their behaviors so that in turn people are healthier and more productive.

Most interesting project you ever worked on: In the early 1990s, I was the principal investigator for a study evaluating the effects of exercise training on elderly patients with Alzheimer's disease. At the start of the study, the participants were less than enthusiastic about exercise training – to put it mildly! It was fascinating to witness how their enthusiasm grew with each week of program participation and how much the study participants benefited, both physically and mentally, from the exercise program.

If you could trade places with one person for a day, who would it be? My passion for sport and exercise was one of the key factors that motivated me to become a doctor. During my medical career, I have had the privilege of working with many elite athletes. For example, I helped tennis great Jimmy Connors with his exercise and nutrition program, and we co-authored a book called “Don't Count Yourself Out: Staying Fit After 35.” While working with Jimmy, I witnessed him in action, up close – what a phenomenal athlete! If I could trade places with one person for a day and if the purpose of so doing was not to influence policy or decision making, etc., I would trade places with Jimmy when he was at the height of his career. I would love to experience the exhilaration of being able to play a competitive sport with such great skill and ability.

What's one thing you're glad your company didn't know about you before you were hired? I currently serve as the CEO of a population health management company, Intervent International, and as the medical director of Intervent's strategic partner, Washington D.C.- based Wellness Corporate Solutions. Because I was the founder of Intervent, I did not go through a hiring process. When it comes to Wellness Corporate Solutions, one thing I'm glad they didn't know about me is that I am an introvert by nature. I constantly have to work on being more outgoing in situations where it is in the business's best interests.

What is your greatest extravagance? Drinking a really good single malt Scotch when celebrating special occasions with family and friends.

Worst piece of business advice you ever received: That it is impossible to be a successful doctor, researcher, entrepreneur and businessman all at the same time.

Favorite place to do business: New York City, for four key reasons. First, I love the "can-do attitude" and indomitable spirit of the people of New York. Second, my older daughter works as an actuary in New York, and I love seeing her – my younger daughter works with me so, fortunately, we get to see each other far more frequently. Third, it is the one place that I can easily talk my wife into joining me when traveling for business. Fourth, the restaurants are great!

What word or phrase do you most overuse? "Where there's a will there's a way."

What D.C.-area business leader do you most admire and why? Ben Bernanke. Although much remains to be done, I think he has done an outstanding job in helping to bring the economy from the brink of disaster to where it is today.

What's one thing you can't live a day without? Besides being in contact with my family, I would have to say the motivational and character-building quotes my younger daughter sends me each day. The first thing I do each morning is read the quote and then attempt to apply what I have read to my work and life in general.

Which historical figure do you most identify with? Nelson Mandela has been an inspiration to me for many years. His life and contributions to mankind are incomparable. During my medical career I have been somewhat of a pioneer when it comes to helping lifestyle management gain the recognition it deserves in mainstream medical practice. In the process, I have had to face and overcome numerous challenges and obstacles. When doing so, I have identified with and gained strength from the extreme hardships Nelson Mandela had to endure when standing up for what he knew to be just and correct.

Nicole Duhring
Digital Producer
Washington Business Journal

