



12

MedFest was created to offer the physical exam that all athletes need prior to participating in Special Olympics sports programming. It is sometimes the first exposure these athletes have to medical care. In many cases, life-threatening conditions have been found and subsequently treated thanks to MedFest.

IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT:

MedFest examinations have found that a large percentage of Special Olympics athletes have significant secondary health concerns. Unfortunately medications commonly taken by people with intellectual disabilities are often associated with long-term side effects such as osteoporosis, weight gain, and sun sensitivity.

90% of primary care residency programs in the U.S. offer no training in caring for people with intellectual disabilities

81% of graduating medical students in the U.S. report not having any training in the care of people with intellectual disabilities

60% of adult Special Olympics athletes are overweight or obese

29% of Special Olympics athletes under the age of 22 are overweight or obese

GOALS:

- 1.** Offer a free sports physical and other health examinations services to people with intellectual disabilities.
- 2.** Recruit new athletes to Special Olympics.
- 3.** Foster new partnerships between Special Olympics and the community.
- 4.** Provide physicians, nurses and other health care providers with training and specialized experience in the examination and assessment of people with intellectual disabilities.

In The Field

Like many people with intellectual disabilities, Zuebeyde Horus, a Special Olympics athlete from Turkey, was living with a serious heart condition, but her caretakers didn't know – until a volunteer doctor with the Special Olympics Healthy Athletes program discovered it.

“We realized that she had a serious heart murmur, and should be referred to a cardiologist,” said Dr. Erhan Sayali, a clinical director who organizes MedFest for Special Olympics Turkey.

At a follow-up appointment, Zuebeyde was diagnosed with Atrioventricular septal defect. The condition is a hole between the various chambers and valves of the heart which causes abnormal blood flow and forces the heart to work much harder than it normally would. Fortunately, Zuebeyde was able to get the surgery she needed.

“Treatment will effectively double or triple that athlete’s life expectancy — adding 20 to 40 years of life,” said Dr. Matthew Holder, Global Medical Advisor for Healthy Athletes. **“I hope other programs will be inspired by this success.”**

