

Effectiveness of a Physical Activity Loyalty Scheme to Maintain Behaviour Change: A Cluster Randomised Controlled Trial

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Abstract : Background: As a large proportion of the UK workforce is employed in sedentary occupations, worksite interventions have the potential to contribute significantly to the health of the population. The UK Government is currently encouraging the use of financial incentives to promote healthier lifestyles but there is a dearth of evidence regarding the effectiveness and sustainability of incentive schemes to promote physical activity in the workplace. Methods: A large cluster RCT is currently underway, incorporating nested behavioural economic field experiments and process evaluation, to evaluate the effectiveness of a Physical Activity Loyalty Scheme. Office-based employees were recruited from large public sector organisations in Lisburn and Belfast (Northern Ireland) and randomised to an Intervention or Control group. Participants in the Intervention Group were encouraged to take part in 150 minutes of physical activity per week through provision of financial incentives (retailer vouchers) to those who met physical activity targets throughout the course of the 6 month intervention. Minutes of physical activity were monitored when participants passed by sensors (holding a keyfob) placed along main walking routes, parks and public transport stops nearby their workplace. Participants in the Control Group will complete the same outcome assessments (waiting-list control). The primary outcome is steps per day measured via pedometers (7 days). Secondary outcomes include health and wellbeing (Short Form-8, EuroQol-5D-5L, Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well Being Scale), and work absenteeism and presenteeism. Data will be collected at baseline, 6, 12 and 18 months. Information on PAL card & website usage, voucher downloads and redemption of vouchers will also be collected as part of a comprehensive process evaluation. Results: In total, 853 participants have been recruited from 9 workplaces in Lisburn, 12 buildings within the Stormont Estate, Queen's University Belfast and Belfast City Hospital. Participants have been randomised to intervention and control groups. Baseline and 6-month data for the Physical Activity Loyalty Scheme has been collected. Findings regarding the effectiveness of the intervention from the 6-month follow-up data will be presented. Discussion: This study will address the gap in knowledge regarding the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a workplace-based financial incentive scheme to promote a healthier lifestyle. As the UK workforce is increasingly sedentary, workplace-based physical activity interventions have significant potential in terms of encouraging employees to partake in physical activity during the working day which could lead to substantial improvements in physical activity levels overall. Implications: If a workplace based physical activity intervention such as this proves to be both effective and cost-effective, there is great potential to contribute significantly to the health and wellbeing of the workforce in the future. Workplace-based physical activity interventions have the potential to improve the physical and mental health of employees which may in turn lead to economic benefits for the employer, such as reduction in rates of absenteeism and increased productivity.

Keywords : behaviour change, cluster randomised controlled trial, loyalty scheme, physical activity

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