

Promoting Physical Activity as a Lifestyle Medicine Intervention in a Primary Care Setting



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Background

The London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames' Public Health Division has developed a 10-year Physical Activity Plan that includes a behavior change campaign to foster regular physical activity habits among residents by connecting them with resources and green spaces.

A General Practitioner based at Richmond Medical Group NHS surgery (RMG), completing a fellowship with Richmond council, led this work. She closely worked with the head public health physical activity lead responsible for the 10-year Physical Activity Plan (2021-2031). They collaborated on promoting physical activity with local NHS primary care staff, patients and physical activity service providers.

As a GP with a special interest in Lifestyle Medicine, completing a Public Health fellowship with Richmond council the London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames' Public Health Division, I felt well placed to lead on this local initiative, championing the personalisation agenda in my general practice, encouraging individuals to change their lifestyle behaviour and move more.



Dr Clarisse Nirere

Richmond Medical Group Website: Richmond Medical Group
Richmond Moves campaign - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Introduction

This is a collaborative initiative, engaging Public Health, Primary Care health professionals and community services to promote physical activity as a healthy lifestyle intervention.

We set out to promote physical activity among the inactive population in Richmond Upon Thames. One of Public Health's key actions of its 10-year Physical Activity Plan is to shift attitudes and create social norms by conducting campaigns to motivate people to move more. During this year's campaign 'Richmond Moves. Every Day. Your Way', one objective is to engage with GP practice staff to act as champions through brief advice and role modelling. The intention is to motivate their patients to increase their activity levels in their own way, including use of parks, outdoor and green spaces for physical activity.

Physical activity is one of the six pillars of lifestyle medicine. The Chief Medical Officers state that if physical activity was a pill, doctors would prescribe it because it helps treat and prevent many health problems.

In Richmond Upon Thames:

- 1 in 5 adults report being active for less than 30 minutes a week (2021/22) up from 17.6% in 2020/2021.
- Obesity rates have increased year on year since 2019/2020 and over half of adults are overweight.
- There is disparity in physical activity with women, older adults and individuals with lower income having lower participation levels.
- Has more green spaces than any other London borough, with 128 parks and areas of open space.

Richmond Medical Group (RMG) Surgery

A friendly two sites-based surgery in the borough of Richmond (Sheen and Kew) with a mixed population group of over 17,000 people. The senior managing team and partners have been keen in supporting initiatives that promote patients' and staff wellbeing.

Methods

- "Inspiring to witness a successful practice parkrun event delivered in effective and cost-effective way and this motivated me to roll this out and share learning with active practices."* – Dr Clarisse Nirere
- GP conducted a literature review to understand current barriers and motivating factors for residents to be physically active and adopt a healthy lifestyle.
 - Public Perspectives on Healthy Living survey of residents' lifestyle attitudes found that residents welcomed health professionals suggesting healthy lifestyle interventions.
 - Two evidence-based interventions using physical activity as a lifestyle intervention were identified: 1) Parkrun and 2) the Active Practice accreditation by the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) which promotes physical activity to staff and patients.
 - RMG sent out emails to all eligible patients (with BMI ≥ 30 kg/m² and hypertensive) inviting them to register and join the parkrun. RMG's Clinical Director invited staff members from other local surgeries.
 - Worked with local social prescribers from the charity RUILS and RMG practice NHS Health Checks team champions to recruit patients and follow up.
 - RMG staff promoted the 'Richmond Moves. Every Day. Your Way.' campaign, parkrun, Couch to 5K, displayed posters in the surgery reception area and networked with various patients groups and local running groups.



Image: RUILS social prescriber at the parkrun

Results

- There were about 100 patients and staff at the parkrun, making the regular parkrun event a great turnout of over 500 finishers. This was the highest number of participants for a practice park run for Richmond Park.**
- Take up was encouraging from local groups, for example, the Refugee Run Club attended with over 20 people.
- Increased confidence in GP and staff to lead the work around physical activity.
- At least 10 new runners and park walkers (including diverse ethnic groups and women) have enrolled onto the local Couch to 5 K running groups within a month post parkrun.
- The Director of Public Health and five Public Health staff members took part in the parkrun.
- Staff gave positive feedback stating that running with patients nudged them to take part.
- Patients found it easy to get involved and have requested more local physical activity events, including organised parkrun events.
- The Richmond Moves. Every Day. Your Way. campaign now includes local parkruns as a specific activity to be active.
- RMG and their Primary Care Network have been officially recognised by RCGP as Active Practices.
- RMG continue to work with Public Health to work on physical activity healthy lifestyle interventions.

What collaborators said

"The doctors' practices in Kew and Sheen had advertised the event so attendance was high. Luminaries included the Director of Public Health in Richmond." – Parkrun news 9/6/24

"I am very impressed by the public health team. They brought a large number of people to a recent Richmond parkrun. We are hoping to start a third couch25k kew group with the Richmond Medical Group [following the parkrun]." – Couch to 5 K coordinator

Discussion

It was inspiring to see this non-clinical lifestyle intervention delivered in a collaborative, cost effective way with a local Public Health team.

This demonstrates that physical activity is a lifestyle intervention that can be promoted and delivered in general practice.

Our plan is to repeat and replicate it in other practices.

Key tips to make it happen

From GP/practice perspective

- Promoting physical activity is fundamental to enhancing overall health and is critical in the primary and secondary prevention of long-term conditions.
- High levels of patient contact offers opportunities for health promotion with healthcare professionals playing a pivotal role.
- Having physical activity conversations in routine consultations is feasible - making every contact count
- The practice parkrun initiative promotes the idea that More activity is better, but some is good - encourages everyone to move in their own way.

From public health perspective

- Practice-based lifestyle medicine intervention delivered by Primary Care practices across the borough has the potential to increase its reach through collaboration with Public Health leveraging its campaign, resources and senior level support.
- Promoting physical activity in outdoor spaces encourages more than good physical health, but also social connectedness and positive mental health.

Image: Consultant in Public Health and Senior Physical Activity Lead at the parkrun



Conclusions

- Practice-based lifestyle medicine intervention for increasing physical shows promising results.
- Primary Healthcare professionals were upskilled to deliver and lead lifestyle interventions during everyday practice, making every contact count
- Primary Care professionals are trusted to deliver and lead lifestyle interventions in every encounter in keeping with the findings from the Public Perspectives on Healthy Living in Richmond survey.
- Plans to promote and do further parkruns with GP practices are underway.

References

Richmond Moves campaign - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Public Health Adult Physical Activity Plan - London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Public Perspectives on Healthy Living in Richmond. Healthwatch Richmond and London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames. March 2023.

Richmond Medical Group

National General Practice Profiles - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care (phe.org.uk)

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