A loyalty scheme to encourage physical activity in office workers: a cluster RCT

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Declared competing interests of authors: Frank Kee, Emma McIntosh and David French are members of the Public Health Research (PHR) programme Funding Board. Frank Kee is also a member of the PHR Prioritisation Group. David French reports personal fees from the Medical Research Council and from the British Psychological Society, grants from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR), grants from the Medical Research Council, Greater Sport charity (Manchester, UK), the European Commission, Prevent Breast Cancer (Manchester, UK), the Natural Environment Research Council, the Multiple Sclerosis Society and Cancer Research UK, outside the submitted work. Jean Adams reports that her partner is the Director of the NIHR’s PHR programme, which funded this research.

Published August 2019
DOI: 10.3310/phr07150
Plain English summary

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Public Health Research 2019; Vol. 7: No. 15
DOI: 10.3310/phr07150

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Inactive lifestyles are bad for your health. We developed the Physical Activity Loyalty scheme to encourage office workers to incorporate physical activity into their working day. Our study was designed to find out if the Physical Activity Loyalty scheme would help employees to get active during the working day by incentivising walking breaks and providing an interactive website with personalised feedback on goal-setting and the accumulation of Physical Activity Loyalty 'points' (i.e. minutes of activity recorded with remote sensors) that could be redeemed for modest value retail vouchers.

The Physical Activity Loyalty scheme involved employees in four public sector workplaces in two city centres in Northern Ireland, half of whom were randomly chosen to receive the Physical Activity Loyalty scheme programme and the other half were allocated to the control group. We measured participants' levels of physical activity using a pedometer and used questionnaires to look at how they rated their quality of life, the number of hours per day absent from work (through sickness) and their well-being.

The Physical Activity Loyalty scheme lasted for 6 months, with the same measurements taken after 6 months and, again, at 12 months. We held discussion groups with participants to find out about their experiences of taking part.

Despite the vouchers, hints, tips and motivational cues from the website and e-mails, the group who received the Physical Activity Loyalty scheme intervention was slightly less active than the group who had not. However, ratings of well-being were slightly better in those who had received the programme and they had fewer hours absent from work. Feedback on the scheme was positive from participants, retailers and employers, and it is likely that the scheme had wider benefits for the employer in terms of productivity and cost savings.

Given that the programme failed to achieve sufficient change in physical activity as intended, new approaches are needed to explore levels of engagement with programmes such as this.
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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the PHR programme as project number 12/211/82. The contractual start date was in September 2014. The final report began editorial review in April 2018 and was accepted for publication in October 2018. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The PHR editors and production house have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the final report document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PHR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the PHR programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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