

Promoting physical activity and physical function in people with long-term conditions in primary care: the Function First realist synthesis with co-design

Rebecca-Jane Law,^{1*} Joseph Langley,² Beth Hall,³
Christopher Burton,⁴ Julia Hiscock,¹
Lynne Williams,¹ Val Morrison,⁵ Andrew B Lemmey,⁶
Candida Lovell-Smith,⁷ John Gallanders,⁷
Jennifer Cooney⁶ and Nefyn H Williams⁸

¹School of Health Sciences, Bangor University, Bangor, UK

²Lab4Living, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, UK

³Library and Archives Services, Bangor University, Bangor, UK

⁴School of Allied and Public Health Professions, Canterbury Christ Church University, Canterbury, UK

⁵School of Psychology, Bangor University, Bangor, UK

⁶School of Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences, Bangor University, Bangor, UK

⁷PPI research partner

⁸Department of Primary Care and Mental Health, Institute of Population Health, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

*Corresponding author r.law@bangor.ac.uk

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Plain English summary

The Function First realist synthesis with co-design

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Plain English summary

As people age and develop long-term conditions, their physical function can decline, leading to disability and loss of independence. How can general practices best promote physical activity and reduce this decline?

We asked people with long-term conditions, general practice staff and other experts about how to promote physical activity and improve physical function. We combined these ideas with those in research reports and developed ideas (or theories) about how to increase physical activity in people with long-term conditions. We also considered how these theories might work in different circumstances.

The five theories are as follows:

1. Consultations in general practice surgeries tend not to prioritise physical activity and function.
If the culture of the practice is supportive of physical activity, then encouraging physical activity will become part of the usual routine.
2. Physical activity promotion is inconsistent and unco-ordinated. If physical activity promotion has more resources, then this will improve opportunities to change behaviour.
3. People with long-term conditions have varying physical activity levels, attitudes and opportunities.
If physical activity promotion is adapted to individual needs and preferences, then people will be more likely to carry on.
4. Many general practice staff lack knowledge and confidence about promoting physical activity.
If training makes staff more capable, then they will be better at promoting physical activity.
5. If a programme makes sense and is trustworthy, then patients and professionals will engage with it.

We used these theories to design a new way of working with patients, health professionals and researchers. Resources were created for developing an environment that encourages physical activity, knowledge about physical activity and a new role for someone who can encourage people to use local opportunities to be more active.

This product would need to be developed further, considered alongside existing schemes and tested in a future study.

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