

Physical activity on Prescription

Prescribed organized activity to promote public health

What was the intention with the study?

A growing health problem in today's society is the increased sedentary time, which leads to a low level of physical activity and results in an increased risk of various diseases and premature death. Physical activity on Prescription (PaP) is a model that is used in the Nordic countries and more specific all counties in Sweden in order to promote physical activity and improve individual's health condition. There are many ways in how to perform exercise and one common way is through organized exercise which is included in PaP. However, this needs to be further explored in order to; identify individuals who would benefit from this, understand the impact of the prescription of physical activity levels and how it should be implemented in the clinical setting. With this background had the study of Amanda Ek (Physical Therapist, MSc) aimed to investigate the effectiveness of PaP including organized exercise through an observational study¹.

What was the method?

In the autumn of 2009 and spring 2010 were prospective data obtained from four Swedish counties in the middle and southern part of Sweden. These counties would represent local differences in size, urban/rural area and individual's health status and varying socioeconomic factors. 98 patients who had been prescribed PaP including organized training at least once a week to prevent or to treat disease that was related to insufficient physical activity were included in the study. The majority of participants were women in the age group 50-69 years and almost 70% were classified as overweight or obese according to body mass index (BMI). The study was evaluated through a questionnaire which included self-reported physical activity levels, adherence, factors affecting adherence and experience of PaP. The questionnaire was administered at baseline, three and six months after the initiation of PaP, and after dropout answered 71 participants the questionnaire at the six months follow-up.

How effective was PaP including organized exercise?

The results showed that approximately 70% of the participants were active in multiple activities, walking and aerobics were the most common physical activities at all measurement occasions. Those who demonstrated a significant increase in activity level from baseline to six months follow-up were those who was categorized in the group's "sedentary" or "light activity". 68% adhered to the prescribed level of physical activity six months after the initiation of PaP including organized exercise and the stage "maintenance" increased significantly in the participant's readiness to change their physical activity level. The level of adherence



Photo: Bilder@BILDBYRÅN

¹ Ek, A. (2011). *Promoting public health by Physical activity on Prescription, with focus on organized exercise*. Nordic School of Public Health, ISSN 1104-5701.

to PaP including organized exercise was considered equivalent to that is achieved with other treatments of chronic diseases. Positive factors that influenced adherence included the experiences of positive effects, that it was fun and had made up my mind before. In order to begin and continue with physical activity most participants considered that PaP including organized exercise was a good method, especially individuals who are unmotivated or have low self-efficacy may benefit from organized exercise in the beginning. The benefits included individualized counseling and adjusted training and support from other participants. Most of the participants were satisfied with the initial support they got from health care and exercise organizers, but there was a need for more regular and longer support. However, more than 70% of participants were satisfied with the assistance they received from exercise organizers in comparison with more than 60% from health care center. The high level of satisfaction to exercise organizers may be due to the exercise organizers positive attitude to PaP-model and the individuals who are prescribed it. On the other hand, the disadvantages of organized activities was considered economical costs and reduced flexibility.

What means the results?

The study indicates that PaP including organized exercise can influence to decrease sedentary behaviour, which improves the individual state of health. To treat various diseases through physical activity proves that the need for physical activity in our modern society is huge, regardless of the individual background according to this study. Organizations that assists with organized physical activities are valuable in order to provide and support individuals to continue with physical activity. This study demonstrates that in Sweden PaP is a beneficial model in many ways, especially to promote physical activity and public health. PaP-model is also used in other Nordic countries. This strengthens that the PaP-model works and is successful, which hopefully will lead to that other countries become curious and interested to implement physical activity on prescription that include organized exercise to promote public health.