

National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

Centre for Public Health Excellence

Review proposal: 4th May 2011

Consideration of an update of the public health guidance on

‘promoting physical activity in the workplace’

1 Background information

Guidance issue date: May 2008

Intervention guidance

3 year review

2 Process for updating guidance

Public health guidance is reviewed 3 years after publication to determine whether all or part of it should be updated.

The process for updating NICE public health guidance is as follows:

- NICE convenes an expert group to consider whether any new evidence or significant changes in policy and practice would be likely to lead to substantively different recommendations. The expert group consists of

selected experts and academics, the review team that produced the original evidence reviews, representatives of relevant government departments and representatives from relevant industry sectors.

- NICE consults with stakeholders on its proposal for updating the guidance (this review consultation document).
- NICE may amend its proposal, in light of feedback from stakeholder consultation.
- NICE determines where any guidance update fits within its work programme, alongside other priorities.

3 Consideration of the evidence and practice

The expert group discussed current and ongoing research of relevance to the current recommendations.

It was felt that the current recommendations were unlikely to change in the light of new evidence and that any changes in the evidence base underpinned the business case for the guidance rather than to reflecting on the recommendations themselves. However, the guidance could be better positioned in terms of using better language, focussing more on benefits to business and making a strong business case.

It was felt that clearer evidence could be presented relating to the benefits and costs of having physically active employees and creating clearer links to the benefits to the organisation, to the employees as a group and to the individual employee.

There have been significant shifts in the policy landscape that can affect these recommendations. The most notable among these is the Responsibility Deal, which can provide a huge opportunity for this guidance to find its audiences better than it currently does.

The group felt strongly that an overview of workplace wellness/health was called for and that a systems approach to work and health was needed. It was noted that most existing programmes are multi-faceted and would not work in isolation (for example, physical activity interventions alongside healthy eating interventions to prevent/tackle obesity). Work is a fundamental determinant of health, and it is more useful in current political contexts to think about 'wellbeing' in the workplace rather than specific health promotion or education activities.

New research into sedentary behaviour is also coming to light and sedentary time at work is an important health indicator. Sedentary behaviour is becoming regarded as an independent risk factor for ill health.

4 Equality and diversity considerations

There has been no evidence to indicate that the guidance does not comply with anti-discrimination and equalities legislation. However the following areas need to be borne in mind:

- Care needs to be taken that workplace physical activity programmes do not exclude people with disabilities.
- The nature of the guidance means that it excludes people who are workless, although it does include people who work in voluntary roles.
- Parts of any workplace guidance may be difficult to implement for organisations with home-working staff or staff who normally work remotely for other reasons.

5 Recommendation

The group recommended the following:

- i. The guidance on increasing physical activity in the workplace should be updated. The update should take account of, and reflect both cost effective and non cost effective interventions in the recommendations. The focus of the guidance should be broadened to take account of new research into the health effects of the sedentary nature of most work as an independent risk factor. Consideration should also be given to research on the use of incentives.
- ii. The updated guidance would be more useful in the context of a broader programme of work that takes an overview/systems approach to workplace well-being. It was agreed that work is a fundamental determinant of health, and it is more useful to consider well-being at work generically rather than specific health promotion activities, for example, in terms of preventing obesity, physical activity health promotion in the absence of healthy eating advice is likely to be less effective.

6 Next steps

Following consultation on this draft review proposal, the final recommendation will be made to NICE's Guidance Executive. Following that, the outcome will be made available on the website.

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