

Integrated health promotion is making a difference.....

West Wimmera Health Service Physical Activity Challenge

In response to the prevalence of obesity, diabetes and inactivity in West Wimmera Health Service (WWHS) Catchment's area¹²³, Lowan Community Health Nurses at WWHS, conducted a 6 week Physical Activity (PA) Challenge in an effort to encourage individuals to include PA into their lifestyles. Offered to WWHS employees at all sites, 60 participants (15 teams of 4) took the Challenge in a contest to participate in the most amount of PA over the 6 week period. By accepting the Challenge, team members were required to include physical activity into their lifestyles and record their activity levels on the tally sheet provided over a six-week period, from Monday 27th October, until Sunday 14th December 2008. Nominated team captain's collected their team's weekly tally and submitted the week's total (in minutes) to the Lowan Community Health Nurses' who then reported and distributed the tallies and the leading team.

Participants were instructed to only count activities that make you moderately out of breath, of at least 10-minute duration. Activity that was part of your normal day such as walking around your home or workplace and doing household chores/work activities was not to be counted. Suggested activities included walking, jogging, swimming, cycling, gym classes, aerobics or vigorous gardening.

At the commencement of the Challenge, each participant undertook a health screening; inclusive of blood pressure, heart rate, weight, waist measurement, blood glucose level and a stress level measurement. At the completion of the six week PA Challenge, participants again undertook the health screening to determine winners of the prize categories.

Prizes at the completion of the challenge were awarded under three different categories:

- 1) The team who spent the greatest amount of time completing physical activity over the 6 weeks.
- 2) The most improved team, measured by team change in amount of time spent active at the start of the Challenge compared with the end, and
- 3) The team with the greatest improvement in health; decided by pre and post measurements.

What has been the integrated health promotion response?

Participants were registered as a team or as an individual and placed in a team. Each participant underwent a health screening a provided with an information pack including instructions about the Challenge, the benefits of incorporating PA into lifestyles and a brochure of the available PA sessions/options in the area eg. aerobics, walking groups and the gym. The Nhill Gym was offered to

registered participants free of charge on Tuesday and Thursday under the guidance of an exercise physiologist and proved popular.

Each week a healthy tips sheet was distributed to participants with a list of healthy tips to increase PA levels and information on nutrition along with a recipe of the week.

On completion of the Challenge, participants were invited to a healthy morning tea for presentation of the awards. Each participant was also presented with a drink bottle and a pedometer as a motivational tool to encourage PA.

What are the impacts?

The Challenge proved extremely successful with the aim of increased PA being met as well as a combined weight loss of 63.1 kg and many other positives identified. Participant evaluations reported increased feelings of well being, loss of waist measurements, increased energy levels, decrease in blood pressure and an increase in self esteem and staff morale. 6 weeks following the completion of the Challenge, many participants report to still include PA into their daily lifestyle and the benefits they feel. The weekly health tips provided education on the benefits of an active life style, nutrition and healthy recipe that consumers reported to be very beneficial.

An outline of the program details have been forwarded to other health services at their request.

What's next?

Unfortunately, ethical consent was not obtained from participants and hence, a study was not possible on the data collected. However, it was evident from measurable outcomes collected from pre and post health screenings that there was weight loss, a reduction in blood pressure, and waist measurements and participants reported an increase in feelings of well being, increased energy levels and increased staff morale amongst the Workplace.

Success of the program prompted staff to enter the Workplace Challenge program in a chance to win funding to tackle the obesity crisis and build a healthier future for the community. The only Victorian entrant to win one of these hotly contested grants and claiming second runner-up in the category of 'Population under 10,000'. The \$3,000 grant to implement a Me-Change strategy, courtesy of the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal, ABC Rural and ABC Grandstand, is currently being utilized by Lowan Rural Health Network Staff at WWHS to run a similar program amongst the larger businesses and workplaces in the WWHS catchment's area. Over the 6 sites there are 20 businesses and 275 participants registered in the Challenge. The Challenge is currently underway with the results yet to be measured however, verbal feedback is positive.

Further information

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References

References

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3. Vic Health Resource Centre, facts and statistics website accessed 05/01/09, www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/en/Resource-Centre/Facts-and-Statistics.aspx

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