

Community Sports Committee

Exercise Prescription Project

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to outline the exercise prescription project (EPP) which aims to promote physical activities among members of the public through the conjoint efforts of the Government, medical practitioners and community groups in Hong Kong.

BACKGROUND

2. Promotion of physical activity is becoming an important public health action in view of the growing evidence of the importance of regular exercise to health and the generally low level of exercise participation throughout the world. The role of health care professionals in health promotion is well recognized. In Hong Kong, the Thematic Household Survey conducted in 2002 revealed that 19.5% of the general population had consulted a doctor in the two weeks prior to the survey. This meant that an average person would visit a doctor 4.2 times in a year. Hence, general practitioners provide a convenient, reliable and effective source of advice, support and encouragement to motivate people to engage in regular physical activity.

3. The concept of exercise prescription by writing a sheet of personalized health advice on exercise to an individual was developed and tested among groups of general practitioners in Australia, USA and UK with favourable outcomes. In Hong Kong, the Department of Health (DH) conducted in 2003 a randomized controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of incorporating this approach in general medical practice. The result showed significant improvement in clients' motivation to do exercise upon doctor's advice.

4. In view of the above, DH is collaborating with the Hong Kong Medical Association (HKMA), the Hong Kong Doctors Union (HKDU), Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD), Home Affairs Department (HAD), Physical Fitness Association Hong Kong China, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others to roll out the EPP in two phases, starting January 2006.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

5. The project aims at promoting daily physical activity i.e. an active lifestyle among members of the public, raising community awareness and enlisting multi-sectoral support for increased public participation in physical activity. The specific objectives are :

- To increase the number of doctors adopting exercise prescription in their clinical practice, and
- To increase the number of persons taking part in physical activity upon the doctor's advice.

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

6. A Task Force was set up in March 2005 under the HKMA to oversee the planning and implementation work for the EPP. Four committees were established under the Task Force, responsible for –

- (a) Development of exercise prescription protocol
- (b) Training of practitioners
- (c) Community engagement
- (d) Education and publicity

PROPOSED SCHEDULE

7. Development of exercise prescription protocol and relevant health education resources has been completed in October 2005 and practitioners' training will be completed in December 2005. The project will be ready for launching in January 2006, initially in Tseung Kwan O and Kwun Tong districts. The experience will be reviewed in six months for extension to other parts of Hong Kong later in 2006.

ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

8. Writing an exercise prescription is only the first of a series of steps necessary to support an individual to lead an active lifestyle. Equally important are the receptiveness or sporting culture of the population; processes and structures that create opportunities and impart skills for individuals, and physical environments that enable sports and physical exercise participation. Specific incentive measures may include stepped-up publicity and educational efforts by the relevant District Offices to heighten community awareness of EPP; encouragement and mobilisation of community groups and NGOs at the district level to organise and publicise their physical activity programmes for individuals in need of peer support; encouraging NGOs to capitalise on LCSD's free-use scheme.

EVALUATION

9. Success of the project will be assessed by the level of participation and extent of implementation of exercise prescription by medical practitioners as well as readiness of the community in taking part in physical activity upon the doctor's advice.

ADVICE SOUGHT

10. Members are requested to note the progress of the EPP and advise whether suggestions to engage the community more fully as outlined in paragraph 8 are worth pursuing.

Department of Health
November 2005