

Implementation and evaluation of an incentivized Internet-mediated walking program for obese adults



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PRESS RELEASE



ANN ARBOR: U-M study: Faced with a choice between higher insurance prices or exercising, people got to walking

ANN ARBOR — It was a controversial move when a health insurer began requiring people who were obese to literally pay the price of not doing anything about their weight – but it worked.

When people had to choose between paying up to 20 percent more for health insurance or exercising more, the majority of enrollees met fitness goals one step at a time via an Internet-tracked walking program, according to a joint study by the University of Michigan Health System and Stanford.

Researchers evaluated a group of people insured by Blue Care Network who were enrolled in a pedometer-based program as a requirement to receive insurance discounts. After one year, nearly 97 percent of the enrollees had met or exceeded the average goal of 5,000 steps a day – including the most resistant participants who disagreed with the financial incentives and found the program “coercive.”

“There are ethical debates around the idea of forcing someone to be personally responsible for health care costs related to not exercising, but we expect to see more of these approaches to financially motivate healthier behaviors,” says senior author Dr. Caroline R. Richardson, assistant professor in the U-M Department of Family Medicine, investigator with the VA Center for Clinical Management Research and member of the U-M Institute for Healthcare Policy and Innovation.

“Our evaluation of Blue Care’s incentivized program showed a surprisingly high rate of people who enrolled in the Internet-mediated walking program and stuck with it – even among those who were initially hostile to the idea. Wellness interventions like this clearly hold significant promise for encouraging physical activity among adults who are obese.”

“Our findings suggest that incentivized wellness programs are acceptable to many individuals and that these programs encourage healthy behaviors,” says lead author Dr. Donna Zulman, instructor in the Division of General Medical Disciplines at Stanford University and research investigator at the VA Palo Alto Health Care System. “Comprehensive evaluations are needed to determine whether participation in these programs translates to meaningful changes in health and costs of health care.”

The full **press release** can be found here: http://www.heritage.com/articles/2013/05/17/ann_arbor_journal/news/doc5193c99755385000346049.txt?viewmode=2

The **article** can be found here: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs13142-013-0211-6#>

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