



COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR ALL STAFF IN RIGSHOSPITALET - COPENHAGEN UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

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▪ **Abstract**

Issue

The aim of the intervention was to integrate Workplace Health Promotion (WHP) into the everyday work routine at Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital, and to make special efforts to engage employee groups who are typically reluctant to take part in WHP.

Action

Participation in a variety of physical activities (including the setting up of a fitness centre at the hospital) and a series of lectures on health were offered to all employees at Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital and efforts were made to make these easily accessible for them. A special effort was made to encourage the participation of employee groups that typically do not participate in WHP. Members of the target group were offered participation in special training groups and individual health profiles. Representatives of this 'special' target group were invited to participate in focus groups to discuss how to motivate colleagues to participate in the intervention. Participation was voluntary and the WHP activities were free for the employees.

Results

- At least one third of all 8,000 employees at Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital were expected to participate in one or more of the campaigns. During the intervention, 3,727 employees participated in one or more of the campaigns.

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- At least one fourth of the employees in the special target group (roughly 1,000 persons) were expected to participate in the intervention. During the intervention 2,081 employees from this special target group participated in one or more of the campaigns that were directed towards the target group or towards all employees.
- After exercising, many participants experienced an increase in happiness, and employees have become more aware of the benefits associated with e.g. taking the stairs every day. There are examples of employees who have not previously been physically active, but because of the intervention have adopted healthy habits.
- The intervention is generally perceived to have contributed to improved social relations among staffs at the hospital.

2. Organisations involved

Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital

The Prevention Fund (Forebyggelsesfonden)



3. Description of the case

3.1. Introduction

A big challenge for an enterprise is to integrate workplace health promotion (WHP) activities into the typical work routines at workplaces in a natural and convenient way. Experiences with WHP also indicate that employees with the highest 'objective' needs for health promotion are the least likely to take part in these activities.

Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital employs roughly 8,000 people (Fig. 1). In order to put health and healthy lifestyle choices on the agenda for the employees, the intervention aimed to create a culture where healthy choices are made easy and accessible for the employees and where the health of the employees becomes an integrated part of the human resources management at the hospital (Fig. 2).

Figure 1: Rigshospitalet



Figure 2: Logo of the project "Healthy Hospitals"





3.2. Aims

The aim of the intervention was to motivate and engage employees at Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital to participate in WHP activities. A special effort was made to engage employee-groups who do not normally participate in health promotion to take part in these types of activities.

3.3. What was done, and how?

All 8,000 employees at Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital were invited to participate in the intervention. It was voluntary to participate and the WHP activities were provided free for the employees.

Furthermore, a special target group of employees who typically do not choose to participate in WHP was identified. This target group included employees with more vocational-type education or training, such as porters, cleaning staff, kitchen staff, nursing assistants, office clerks, and secretaries. According to the literature on WHP, members of target group are known to have a less healthy lifestyle than other groups of employees in hospitals and to have a more strenuous physical work environment. The target group additionally included senior employees above 45 years of age, regardless of their educational background. The special target group included roughly 4,000 employees, and this group were allowed to use their 8½ working hours to participate in the intervention. Additional participation could happen outside normal working hours.

The members of the special target group were also asked to take part in semi-structured 'focus interviews'. One hundred and twenty three employees from the target group participated in the focus interviews, conducted with the aim to: 1) engage the employees in identifying the WHP activities of the intervention; 2) identify convenient times and locations for the WHP activities; and 3) identify potential barriers that could impede participation. From the focus group interviews it was concluded that it was important that the activities were scheduled during or in immediate proximity of the working hours, and that the activities were located at the hospital or close to the hospital. An added benefit of the focus interviews was to instigate 'ownership' towards the intervention among the participants, as it was expected that the participants would function as a kind of 'ambassadors' for the intervention.

The intervention attempted to reach all employees through a campaign (including folders, stickers and posters) and via the intranet of the Copenhagen University Hospital. For all participants a central motivating factor was the access to health promoting activities that were formed during the intervention such as fitness activities, running teams and ball-playing teams. These activities enabled the participants to interact with colleagues they already knew or with colleagues from other parts of the hospital. Apart from health promotion, the programme as it is organised, serves to enhance social integration in large-scale work organisations, as it appears to catalyse social interaction among employees across departments/wards.

In the intervention a variety of physical activities, including the setting up of a fitness centre at the hospital, and a series of lectures, including health aspects, were offered to all employees at the hospital. In addition, members of the target group were offered special training programmes and health profiles.

Furthermore, the intervention aimed at integrating health promotion through natural and convenient activities that were easily compatible with and integrated into the workday regime. This was done by ensuring that all activities had their starting point at the Hospital to secure a wide appeal towards its employees.

Finally, to monitor the intervention a steering committee was appointed, including representatives from the top management. Accordingly, the intervention was endorsed by the top management, which is considered an integral element in the implementation of an intervention of this nature.

3.4. What was achieved?

Three types of campaigns were undertaken for all employees in the hospital

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- **Competitions:** Five competitions were arranged during the intervention. In these competitions each department/ward should form a team of no fewer than five participants. The disciplines in the competitions were: (1) Step-counter competitions; (2) Bicycle competitions; (3) the Summer Holiday Run 2010; (4) the Summer Holiday Run 2011; and (5) a competition to assess which department was best in walking up stairs. The evaluation of the intervention showed that the competitions had a great impact on the future activity pattern and on the social working environment for the employees within departments/wards. It can also be noticed that the stair-walking competition and the step-counter competition were successful in terms of staff participation. One reason for this is that these activities were easily integrated into the everyday work routines.
- **Training groups:** 11 training groups were set up during the intervention. Examples of training groups include Running teams (Fig 2), Tai Chi teams, Ball-playing teams, Skiing-teams, Walking-teams, Boxing teams, and Fitness centre teams. In all these campaigns, trained instructors coached the employees in the various disciplines.
- **Lectures:** A series of seven lectures by 'celebrity lecturers' on health and health behaviour were offered to all employees at the hospital. There was a good turnout to all lectures – at some lectures the 340-seat auditorium was full whilst there were some empty seats at other lectures.

Two campaigns were undertaken for the special target group

- **Special disciplines** for the target group: Groups were set up, so that employees could train in special disciplines of interest. Examples of special disciplines include Back-training, Fitness, Body-toning, Yoga, Weight-loss teams, Step, Spinning and Zumba. The majority of these disciplines took place in the fitness centre that was built on the Hospital as part of the intervention, but four of the disciplines were performed on the worksite as an intergraded part of the workday. Totally 49 teams doing special disciplines were completed during the intervention period.
- **Health profiles:** Members of the target group were offered health profiles by undertaking a comprehensive check of their physical capacity. The health profiles focussed on physical strength, physical fitness, flexibility and body composition. On the basis of the health profile, it was possible to calculate a 'body age' of the individual. 480 health profiles were conducted on members of the special target group that consisted of roughly 4,000 persons. Of these, 109 were re-tested after 15 weeks participation in the special disciplines. The re-tests showed that 'body ages' of the re-tested employees on average had dropped two years.

Additional initiatives that were undertaken to support the intervention

- **Fitness centre:** A fully equipped fitness centre – with exercise machines, spinning-bikes, and a gym – was set up at Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital as part of the intervention. After the finalisation of the intervention, the fitness centre has about 1,000 active users.
- **Booking system:** An on-line booking system was set up, so that the employees at the hospital could book a place at the different activities.
- **Managerial support:** The intervention was fully endorsed by the top management of Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital. This support was vital in terms of implementing the intervention.

Results of the intervention

- At least one third of all 8,000 employees at Rigshospitalet - Copenhagen University Hospital were expected to participate in one or more of the campaigns. During the intervention 3,727 employees participated in one or more of the campaigns (Fig. 3).
- At least one-fourth of the employees in the special target group (roughly 1,000 persons) were expected to participate in the intervention. During the intervention, 2,081 employees from the

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special target group participated in one or more of the campaigns that were directed towards the target group or towards all employees.

- Several employees have chosen to continue physical activities because of the intervention. Many employees have experienced an increase in happiness doing physical activities. There are examples of employees who previously have not been physically active, but after the intervention have started to do physical activities several times per week.

Figure 3: The Running Team



- The intervention is generally perceived to have contributed social relationships among staffs at the hospital.
- The fitness centre had 1,500 members at the end of the intervention period. After the finalisation of the intervention the fitness centre had more than 1,000 members.
- The intervention had no visible impact on sickness absence. The evaluation of the intervention showed that the campaigns and special disciplines had a socially integrative effect on employees between departments/wards.
- The intervention is generally perceived to have strengthened the collective identity among the employees at the hospital. It is widely held that the shared experiences that the employees have had within and across departments/wards during the intervention have contributed towards improving social relationships among the staff at the hospital.
- Health profiles were an important motivation factor to change exercise habits for employees who chose to be re-tested.
- In the intervention 18 campaigns were planned, but the demand was such that 23 campaigns were conducted.
- In the intervention 400 health profiles were planned, but the demand was such that 480 health profiles were conducted.
- In the intervention 50 special disciplines were planned for the special target group. In the intervention 49 activities were carried out.

Though the intervention was successful, it also faced some problems

Some activities were easier to integrate into the workday than others. A hospital is an organisation with a tightly structured work schedule. Accordingly, it is not possible for all departments/wards to be flexible in their participation in the activities that were offered. Arguably, this had an impact on the possibilities of the employees to participate in the intervention during working hours. The evaluation of the intervention showed that the majority of the employees in the special target group found it more important that the special activities existed, rather than that they partially took place during working hours. However, exercise during working hours had an important influence on the implementation of



the local teams in which the activities were conducted at the workplace as an integrated part of the work.

Another obstacle was that the intervention was implemented in a very large organisation, which implies a massive effort in order to communicate the aims and scope of the intervention to all of its employees.

3.5. Success factors

The intervention was successful in engaging members of the special target group to participate, and this was shown through the over-representation of this group among the participants in the intervention. One reason for this high representation is that the project offered activities to all employees at the hospital. This choice was taken to avoid a stigmatisation of the special target group and to create an important foundation for an organisational culture change, which was achieved.

Management support to this initiative, as well as a fact that activities were organised near the employees' workplace and fitted their daily routines, can be mentioned as other success factors.

3.6. Further information

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3.7. Transferability

This intervention appears to be transferable to large institutions in different sectors other than health care. The general learning points from the intervention – on how to motivate particular target groups to participate in WHP, the necessity of managerial support and the necessity of a booking system – should be applicable in most large-scale work organisations.

The intervention is also applicable in smaller organisations. In smaller organisations it may be necessary to adjust the scale of the activities to the size of the organisation in terms of number of activities, the need for a booking system etc. However, the experiences of the present intervention to motivate difficult to reach groups to participate in WHP activities should hold currency in smaller organisations.

4. References, resources:

- A Danish description of the project can be found at the web-page of The Prevention Fund: <http://www.forebyggelsesfonden.dk/08-2-3-065.html>