Evaluation of an Employer Sponsored Pedometer-Based Physical Activity Program

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Employer-sponsored physical activity (PA) programs offer an excellent avenue for intervention. The objective of this analysis was to evaluate an employer-sponsored PA program. In 2005, a large city government (N = 2,600 employees) in the intermountains western USA implemented a pedometer-based PA program for its employees. This program was based on a competition format in which individuals formed groups of 10 persons. The groups competed against each other over a 12-week period. The goal was for each person to accumulate 10,000 steps/day. There were no theoretical underpinnings used in this program. Team captains reported each team’s weekly steps via an intranet site for the 64 teams that participated. During the program, individual team members could access their team information and evaluate their team’s performance compared to other teams. Data were cleaned so that only teams with complete data were included in the formal evaluation. After data cleaning, 52 teams remained for further analysis. A repeated-measures ANOVA with a Duncan’s post hoc test was used to examine significant differences in team steps by week of the program. Results indicated that there were significant differences in accumulated steps by week of the study (p < 0.001), with post hoc comparisons indicating significant differences from baseline evident during weeks 6-8, but not at the end of the program (no difference between weeks 1 and 12). These data indicate that competition-based PA programs using pedometers may not be an effective means at increasing employee PA. The initial increase in PA from baseline to weeks 6-8 may have been due to a novelty effect of using the pedometers and the program’s competition format. Future employer sponsored PA programming should use theoretically based planning to increase the efficacy of programs in the workplace. Additionally, considerations should be made to examine the appropriate time frame for program implementation.