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Promoting physical activity - an established part of the clinical practice?

Introduction
Insufficient physical activity is a considerable risk factor for mortality and premature death. The healthcare has a unique role in health promotion as they reach a large part of the population. The evidence based recommendation is that the healthcare sector should offer “counseling with the adjunct of exercise on prescription or a pedometer, as well as special follow-up” to promote patients physical activity. Despite this, physical activity is underutilized in prevention and treatment of disease, for reasons not fully known.

Purpose/Method
We aimed to study the attitudes of different healthcare professionals in the hospital setting, towards the importance of physical activity and its clinical use at different levels. The study comprised 264 (78% women) health care professionals at the cardiac department/outpatient cardiac center in Stockholm (response rate 91%). Data was obtained in 2013, by questionnaire. Containing 28 multiple choice questions on participants attitudes towards physical activity behavior change, the perceived importance of such measures, practical implementation and possible barriers for implementation.

Results
All participants stated importance of physical activity promotion within healthcare. Forty-seven percent reported that they promoted physical activity in clinical practice, however only a minority fulfilled the evidence based recommendations (n=65), as brief advice (n=165) or counseling (n=111) were most common. Sixty-one percent aimed to improve the use of physical activity promotion, factors hampering were inadequate knowledge, follow-up possibilities and length of patient visits. Less than half group reported insufficient routines (46%), goals (37%) and lack of management support (42%).

Conclusion
Although health professionals generally are positive towards promoting physical activity, just a small proportion actually use the evidence based methods in clinical practice. To improve the promotion of physical activity in patients there is need for further implementation strategies at all levels to create a well-functioning structure, clear goals and routines. Our study suggests, that implementation should focus at education, logistics for follow-up and increased amount of time with direct patient care.