

The parkrun practice initiative

Summary

In 2018, the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and parkrun UK launched the [parkrun practice initiative](#) to promote the social prescribing of physical activity through participation in local 5k parkrun events. More than 16% of practices in the UK have registered to become a parkrun practice.

Background

The parkrun practice initiative is a social prescribing programme taking an accessible and low cost approach to promoting health and wellbeing throughout primary care. The initiative enables GPs and practice staff to socially prescribe physical activity by referring patients to one of the more than 660 parkruns that take place throughout the UK every weekend. Building on the research conducted by parkrun in 2017, which revealed that hundreds of healthcare practitioners were already signposting patients to parkrun events, the initiative has rapidly gained interest from primary care teams across the country.

What was involved

The parkrun practice initiative encourages GP practices to link with their local 5k parkrun event(s) to become a parkrun practice, committing to promoting parkrun participation by patients and staff. It is open to all practices, regardless of whether the GPs are members of the RCGP.

The specific aims of the parkrun practice initiative are to:

- improve the health and wellbeing of patients
- improve the health and wellbeing of practice staff
- raise awareness of the services that practices provide
- develop a local community centred around wellness
- support the growth of social prescribing activities

The process begins when practices register via the [parkrun practice website](#) and are then sent marketing assets to display in their waiting room and other materials to share through various communications channels.

Staff are encouraged to promote patient participation in parkrun, as walkers, runners, volunteers or spectators, but also to participate themselves. Not only is staff participation seen to be a morale boosting experience for the whole practice to be engaged in, but it also means that staff are more likely to be persuasive advocates.

A toolkit is available on the parkrun practice website that offers ideas and information on the types of activities that can be undertaken. However, it is deliberately non-prescriptive and the onus is on the practice and their

partnered parkrun(s) to maximise the opportunity in a way that best meets the needs of the local community.

Activities range from more passive forms of promotion, such as putting leaflets in waiting rooms and displaying information on TV screens, to handing out flyers, hosting parkrun information sessions and holding volunteer takeover days, with whole practice teams and patients carrying out the volunteer roles at a particular parkrun. Through this initiative, the practice takes steps towards meeting the [RCGP Active Practice Charter](#) accreditation.

Working Well

To date, more than 16% of practices across the UK have registered. However, the initiative is still in the early stages of development, and an ongoing evaluation by Warwick Medical School will shed light on implementation and impact. Initial results indicate that many staff members have been encouraged to participate in parkrun since becoming a parkrun practice.

The collaboration between the practice and a local parkrun helps make the connection between public health and voluntary organisations, assisting in the creation of healthier, connected communities. At a national level, the collaboration between RCGP and parkrun provides an example of how 2 organisations can work successfully together to run a low-cost, innovative and scalable solution to promoting activity and improving health and wellbeing.

Chrissie Wellington, Global Head of Health and Wellbeing at parkrun UK:

In 16 months we have seen over 1,350 GP practices link with their local parkruns to increase the health of staff and patients and create positive, supportive communities that are centred on wellness. This partnership shows the immense value of bringing together the health and voluntary sectors in pursuit of shared goals, and we look forward to building on this successful collaboration in future.

Dr Andrew Boyd MRCP, GP partner, Clapham Park Group Practice:

We have been blown away by the response from GPs and their teams to this initiative. Its success demonstrates there is a growing appetite amongst GPs to forge meaningful links with local assets and services to help better the health of their patients. I believe the parkrun practice initiative will be a blueprint for future partnerships between healthcare providers and other local community assets.

Further information

There has been considerable demand from across primary and secondary care to replicate the initiative across sectors. However, for the time being, parkrun is focused on the collaboration with RCGP and maximising the impact of this project rather than expanding it to other sectors. [Resources](#) are available to other health care bodies and individuals who wish to signpost staff and patients to these accessible, welcoming community-led events.