## Perceptions of Proposed Infrastructure Improvements and Intention to Walk Among Health Workers in a Rural Appalachian Community

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## Perceptions of Proposed Infrastructure Improvements and Intention to Walk Among Health Workers in a Rural Appalachian Community

Nearly 300,000 people in the United States die each year due to physical inactivity (1, 4). In order to maintain good health, the Surgeon General recommends at least thirty minutes of physical activity at moderate intensity most days of the week. Several studies have shown that walking is the most common physical activity among adults (5, 7). One study administered questionnaires to respondents (half from rural and half from urban communities) and found that the questionnaires provided reliable data about the respondent's perceptions of how well their physical and social environment promoted physical activity. Thus, a survey is useful to gather reasonably accurate information. (1) A number of studies have shown that poor environments for physical activity play an important role in causing inactivity and the growing problem of obesity throughout the United States. (4)

There is mounting evidence that an effective physical environment can promote walking in communities. In order to promote walking effectively, the environment needs to offer places to walk that are available, easily accessible, and convenient for the population to use. It also needs to be safe, well lit, and well maintained. (6, 7) The presence of such features as bike paths and sidewalks, low traffic volume and speed, and low rates of crime have also been related to increased physical activity. (1) Many researchers have concluded that communities nationwide should create a supportive and effective environment with the use of sidewalks, bike paths, and walking trails to increase physical activity such as walking among the population, especially those with the highest risk for inactivity. (2, 3)

Weiss et al found that walking was associated with an individual's age, income, and perception of social support in the communities. This study also found that the presence of

nearby grocery stores, restaurants, and retail stores in communities encouraged walking. This study also found that individuals with lower income were less likely to walk. (9) Cerin et al found that people walked to food stores, retail stores, schools, postal services, restaurants, recreational facilities, parks, bus/train stations, and work. (12)

According to the Census Bureau, the median household income in 1999 for Hazard, Kentucky was 27,226. (8) In 2004/2005 the mean household income for Kentucky was 37,956 and for the United States it was 47,584 (14).

Research suggests that collaboration of large and influential employers from different worksites and agencies, like hospitals, and the community may be able to play a key role in enhancing the walkability of their grounds and the surrounding neighborhoods, decreasing barriers to walking, and promoting physical activity. This also suggests that interventions to enhance physical activity should be directed toward the employer rather than the employee. (11)

Interventions to change the environment should include creating walking trails, building exercise facilities, or providing access to existing nearby facilities. (10) Promoting physical activity, such as walking, to employees can also be beneficial to the employer. Physical activity provides the employer with a healthy staff, it saves money by increasing staff attendance and retention, and it increases productivity as personnel are more healthy and alert. (13)

This study has three primary objectives:

 To obtain information about current activity levels and interest in increased activity among workers at a large hospital in a small rural community in central Appalachia.

- To help determine whether the readiness of hospital employees to increase physical activity is high enough to warrant investment in infrastructures to promote walking.
- 3) To determine if improvements in walking infrastructure would be likely to promote physical activity among health care workers in a rural Appalachian community.

Our hypotheses are:

- Individuals with lower BMIs will report that they participate in physical activity more days per week.
- 2) Younger individuals will be more physically active than older individuals.
- Employees with higher BMIs would be more likely to plan to engage in physical activity.

#### Method

#### Subjects:

Employees from Appalachian Regional Hospital (ARH) were asked to participate in this study. With the permission of the hospital administrator, a survey was distributed to 1006 employees with their paychecks on October 11, 2007. (See the Appendix for the Walking Interest Survey.) Forty completed surveys were returned by the deadline, which was 12 days after the survey was distributed. A secured box was provided in the ARH mail room for the return of the questionnaires. There were no reminders or other attempts to increase the return rate.

A cover letter was included with the Walking Interest Survey that included all the elements of consent. Consent was indicated if the participant returned the anonymous survey

form. Participants were asked to report their gender, age, height and weight, but no identifying information was gathered. Employees under the age of 18 were not eligible to participate in this study and the cover letter asked the employees under the age of 18 not to submit a survey response.

#### **Procedure:**

This study represents the first step in a pre-post quasi-experimental design. Information was gathered from current employees at Appalachian Regional Hospital in Hazard, Kentucky about levels of physical activity, intention to increase physical activity in the future, destinations near the workplace where the respondent would like to walk, suggestions for improved infrastructure and basic demographic information. The same information will be gathered after any infrastructure improvements are completed.

The survey was designed by reviewing the literature for examples, by discussing the content with other researchers and by identifying the information needs of the key collaborators.

Readiness to change or in this case readiness to walk or become physically more active was determined by question 7 of the survey that was distributed (Table 1). Readiness to change is divided into 5 categories, pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Subjects are assigned to the pre-contemplation category if they do not walk currently and do not plan to begin. They are assigned to the Contemplation category if the subject plans to walk but does not plan to do it within the next 30 days. If the subject is ready to change within the next 30 days, they are assigned to the Preparation category. A person who walks or is physically active currently, but has not been doing it for more than 6 months, is assigned to the Action category. Maintenance indicates that the person has been physically active for at least 6 months.

#### **Data Analysis:**

All data were analyzed using SPSS. Once data were entered into SPSS, descriptive statistics were obtained for all variables, including means and frequencies as appropriate. Body Mass Index was calculated for each subject from the height and weight variables, using the standard formula for this calculation (BMI = weight (lbs) /height<sup>2</sup> (inches) \* 703). (15) Correlation coefficients were also calculated among key variables, including age, BMI, readiness to change (to become more physically active), the number of days the subject would like to be active, current health status, the number of days the subject is currently active, how far the subject would walk or run for exercise, and how far the subject would walk or run to go somewhere he or she wanted to go. Age was not correlated with any of these variables and was not included in Table 18, which shows the patterns of correlation among the other variables.

#### Results

Out of the 40 surveys returned, 4 were returned by males, 34 by females and 2 were unknown. Because the vast majority of respondents were female, gender was not used in any of the analyses. The mean age of the subjects was 44.5 years, with a range from 22 to 61. Mean BMI was 31.06 with a range of 20 to 52. A BMI of 30 or above is defined as obese by the United States Centers for Disease Control (http://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/obesity/defining.htm).

On average, the subjects reported that they spend nearly 60% of their time at work sitting (mean = 2.72 on a scale from 0 to 5), nearly 20% of their time standing (mean = .97), and nearly 40% of their time walking (mean = 1.72).

Nearly half of the respondents reported that they are not currently physically active (Table 1). On average, the respondents reported that they are currently active nearly 3 days per

week (mean = 2.82) but that they would like to be active 5 days a week (mean = 4.92). Only 25% of the subjects reported that are actually physically active 5 or more days a week at the time of the survey (Table 3). There are many reasons why the employees reported they were not physically active now. Over half of the people stated they did not have time. The other main concerns were that the individuals did not have a good place in their homes or outside their homes to be physically active. Nearly a fourth of the subjects reported that they worried about their safety, while small proportions of the subjects reported that physical activity caused pain, that their friends and family were not active, or they were already as active as they wanted to be. Others reported that they would walk 2 or more miles for exercise while only a third reported that they would walk 2 or more miles for exercise while only a third reported that they would walk 2 or more miles to go somewhere. (Table 7)

When asked what prevents walking or running more than they already do, the majority reported that sidewalk problems, unsafe drivers, high speed traffic, and lack of sidewalks were their main concerns (Table 8). A little over half of the individuals that returned the surveys indicated that having shrubs, plants, and flowers near a sidewalk would make them more likely to walk on it (Table 9).

Table 16 displays potential destinations within a mile or two from the hospital where they work and the percentage of subjects who reported that they would want to go to those destinations if they walked from the hospital. New Beginnings Day Care Center and Food City, the nearest grocery store, were among the destinations chosen by the highest percentage of respondents.

Half of the subjects reported that they felt very safe walking near the hospital during the day while only a few reported that they felt very safe walking at night (Table 15). Suggestions

from the surveys to make the area safer include a barrier between cars and walkers, extra lighting during the night, a walking partner, and having a security guard at night. (Table 16)

If new sidewalks are constructed near ARH, the employees suggested that good maintenance, a barrier between cars and walkers, good lighting, wide sidewalks, crosswalks, having a safe environment, and landscaping to keep cars away from the walkers were very important (Table 17).

During analysis we compared the BMI values to the number of days that the employees were active. Other analysis that we compared were physical activity levels and age which had no correlation. We compared BMI to the individual's readiness to engage in physical activity. We also looked at the individual's perceived health and compared it to BMI, which was negatively correlated. The individual's perceived health positively correlated to whether the individual was physically active now. Our study showed that there was no correlation between BMI and age and there is no correlation between physical activity and age. (Table 18)

#### Discussion

In this study we found that Body Mass Index was negatively correlated with perceived health, with current activity levels, and with readiness to begin additional physical activity (Table 18). The individual's perceived health was positively correlated with whether they were physically active at the time of the survey. How far individuals were willing to walk was positively correlated with having a safe environment of sidewalks. Of interest is the fact that age was not correlated with any other variable on this study, including BMI, reported health, and physical activity.

The results of our study support the need for developing a walking infrastructure and demonstrate that at least those employees who responded would be interested in having the option to walk while at work. The majority of respondents were willing to walk around the ARH facility and to nearby places of interests if sidewalks were constructed. We found that well maintained, well lit, safe sidewalks are the main concerns of the employees. They suggest that walking partners, security guards, and a barrier between cars and walkers would be beneficial.

The study measured the employee's readiness to change or to become more physically active. Nearly 83% of the respondents were in the maintenance, action, or the preparation stages of readiness to become physically active. If the respondents represent all employees, this suggests that the majority of the employees at ARH would utilize walking infrastructures around the facility if they were built.

Employers have a chance to increase the health of their workforce by making healthpromoting changes in their work environment. As previously discussed, one study showed that by promoting physical activity employers can save money and increase staff attendance as well as productivity. (13) The majority of the respondents in this study had BMI scores over 25, indicating that they were overweight or obese. High BMI scores were associated with inactivity, poor health, and difficulty considering a more active lifestyle. However, a more active lifestyle could help reduce BMI and provide better health to the employees at ARH, just as it has for others. By building walking infrastructures around the ARH property, this employer could promote physical activity among employees, visitors, and community members. This would be likely to result in a healthier lifestyle and in the long run save millions of dollars on health care costs for their employees.

#### Limitations:

One limitation of this study is the small sample size. Only 40 people out of 1006 returned the questionnaires. Another possible weakness is the type of people that returned the survey. It

could be possible that only people wanting a sidewalk completed the surveys. Individuals that have no interest in walking or constructing a sidewalk probably did not take the time to fill out and return the surveys. These factors should be taken into consideration when reviewing the results. This study will be followed up by administering the survey again after the completion of an enhanced sidewalk network.

Future studies should attempt to implement a procedure to ensure more responses to surveys.

#### **Conclusions:**

In conclusion, our study indicated that respondents with lower BMI participate in physical activity more days per week than respondents with higher BMI scores, which supports Hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 2 was not supported by the results of this study, as we found no relationship between age and physical activity. Likewise, Hypothesis 3 was not supported by our results, as those with higher BMI scores were less likely than others to plan to increase physical activity. This shows that age has no effect on how physically active you are and that the higher your BMI the less likely you are to be performing physical activity. Tables:

Table 1, Question 7:

## Physical Activities on a Regular Basis

Are you physically active now (3 days a week for at least 20 minutes)?	No 52.5 Yes 47.5
If you are physically active now, have you been active regularly for the past 6 months or more?	Of the 47.5 percent that are 40 percent has been active for the past 6 months, and 27.5 percent has not been active for 6 months.
If you are not active now, do you plan to begin regular physical activity in the past 6 months?	Of the 52.5 percent that is inactive now, 10 % said NO and 42.5 % said YES
If you plan to begin regular physical activity in the next 6 months, will you begin within 30 days?	Of the 42.5% that plans to begin physical activity in the next 6 months, 40% agreed that they would begin in the next 30 days. 7.5% did not plan to begin within the next 30 days.

Table 2, Question 7:

### Readiness to Change

Stage of Change	Number of Respondents
Pre-contemplation	6
Contemplation	1
Preparation	14
Action	3
Maintenance	16

Table 3, Question 8:

## How many days a week are you physically active?

0	25%
1	12.5%
2	7.5%
3	17.5%
4	10%
5	10%
7	15%

Table 4, Question 9:

I don't have time	57.5%
I don't have a good place in my home to be	45%
physically active	
I don't have a good place outside my home	40%
to be physically active	
I worry about my safety when I am	27.5%
physically active in my neighborhood	
Physical activity causes me to have pain	7.5%
My family and friends aren't active	10%
I don't want to be physically active	0%
I am already as active as I want to be	10%
Other	10%

## What keeps you from being more physically active?

Table 5, Question 10:

How many days a week would you be active (walk, run, bike, etc) if nothing kept you from doing it?

0 days	0%
1 day	0%
2 days	0%
3 days	22.5%
4 days	12.5%
5 days	32.5%
6 days	10%
7 days	22.5%

Table 6, Question 11:

How much time would you spend being active each day if nothing kept you from doing it?

No time	0%
15 minutes	2.5%
30 minutes	57.5%
45 minutes	17.5%
> 45 minutes	22.5%

### Table 7, Question 12:

	To go somewhere	For exercise
Would not walk (or run) for exercise	2.5%	2.5%
$< \frac{1}{2}$ mile	10%	0%
<sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> mile	7.5%	0%
1 mile	25%	22.5%
1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>2</sub> miles	10%	10%
2 miles	20%	32.5%
>2 miles	10%	32.5%

## How far would you walk (or run) for exercise?

Table 8, Question 13:

### What keeps you from walking or running more than you do?

Sidewalk problems (haven't been built,	62.5%
don't go where I want to go, or in bad	
condition)	
Air problems (vehicle exhaust, fumes from	10%
businesses or other places, allergens in the	
air)	
Lack of crosswalks	27.5%
Lack of stoplights and walk signals	10%
High speed traffic	42.5%
Unsafe drivers	47.5%
Noise from traffic	5%
Unattractive views	7.5%
Other	30%

Table 9, Question 14:

Would you be more likely to walk on a sidewalk if shrubs, plants and flowers were near it?

Yes	57.5%
Maybe	27.5%
No	12.5%

### Table 10, Question15:

#### Places of Interest

Around ARH Property	82.5
New Beginnings Day Care Center	22.5
Food City	22.5
Ponderosa	20
Panda House	17.5
Cliff Hagan's	17.5
Lee's	12.5
Giovanni's	10
Applebee's	10
Wendy's	7.5
Perry County Tire	2.5

Table 11, Question 16:

#### How is your health now?

Excellent	5%
Very good	17.5%
Good	55%
Fair	20%
Poor	2.5%

Table 12, Question 17:

Has a doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional told you that walking would be good for your health?

Yes	92.5%
No	5%
Can't Remember	2.5%

Table 13, Question 18:

Would a walking partner help increase the amount of your walking?

Yes	80%
No	20%

Table 14, Question 19:

Do you have someone to wark with you now?
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Yes	42.5%
No	55%

#### Table 15, Question 20:

How safe do you feel now while walking around the ARH property?

Daylight		Dark		
Very Safe	50%	Very Safe	7.5%	
Somewhat safe	25%	Somewhat safe	15%	
Neither safe nor unsafe	12.5%	Neither safe nor unsafe	5%	
Somewhat unsafe	10%	Somewhat unsafe	40%	
Very unsafe	2.5%	Very unsafe	30%	

Table 16, Question 21:

What is important to help you feel safe while walking around the ARH property on new sidewalks?

Daylight		Dark			
Nothing: I feel safe walking ar	ound ARH	Nothing: I feel safe walking around ARH			
	20%		5%		
A barrier between cars and wa	lkers	A barrier between cars and walkers 40%			
	62.5%				
Crosswalks	32.5%	Crosswalks	15%		
Stop signs for walkers to cross driving		Stop signs for walkers to cross driving			
lanes	12.5%	lanes	17.5%		
Extra Lighting	10%	Extra Lighting	72.5%		
Traffic lights	0%	Traffic lights	2.5%		
A walking partner	25%	A walking partner	25%		
A security guard	7.5%	A security guard	20%		
Nothing: I won't be walking	2.5%	Nothing: I won't be walking	15%		

## Table 17, Question 22:

	Not important	Slightly	Somewhat	Very
	%	Important %	Important %	Important %
Good maintenance	0%	0%	7.5%	92.5%
Barrier between cars and walkers	7.5%	2.5%	15%	75%
Good lighting	2.5%	0%	7.5%	90%
Wide sidewalk	5%	5%	12.5%	77.5%
Crosswalks	10%	17.5%	15%	57.5%
Stop signs or	17.5%	25%	20%	37.5%
stoplights				
Interesting or useful	10%	17.5%	42.5%	30%
destination				
Amount of traffic	7.5%	10%	27.5%	55%
Safe environment	0%	5%	12.5%	82.5%
Landscaping to keep	2.5%	22.5%	12.5%	62.5%
cars away from				
walkers				
Landscaping for	17.5%	22.5%	25%	35%
beauty				

If new sidewalks are constructed near ARH, how important is each of these to you?

Table 18:

Correlation Coefficients Among	g Key Variables
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	BMI	Ready	Days Would Be Active	Health	Active Now	Far for Exercise	Far to Go Somewhere
BMI	1						
Ready	432**	1					
Days Would be	051	.442**	1				
Active							
Health	445**	.376*	.364*	1			
Active Now	399*	.870**	.474**	.459**	1		
Far for exercise	175	.140	.567**	.256	.209	1	
Far to Go Somewhere	.054	014	.345*	.010	.108	.343*	1

\* = P<.05, \*\* = P<.01

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#### Appendix 1 Walking Interest Survey Fall, 2007

1. Age:	2. Height:	3. Weight:	4. Are you: All Male	Female
()		()		

5. What shift do you currently work?\_\_\_\_\_

Please put a check in the box by your answers to the following questions.

6. At your current job, what percentage is closest to the amount of time you spend sitting, standing and walking?

Activity	0%	20%	40%	60%	80%	100%
Sitting						
Standing						
Walking						

## 7. The next four questions are about physical activities, such as walking, exercises and sports, that you do on a regular basis and that increase your breathing or heart rate.

	• 0
a. Are you physically active now (3 days a week	No Yes
for at least 20 minutes each time)?	
b. If you are physically active now, have you been	No Yes
active regularly for the past 6 months or more?	Does not apply (I am not physically active now)
c. If you are not active now, do you plan to begin	No Yes
regular physical activity in the next 6 months?	Does not apply (I am physically active now)
d. If you plan to begin regular physical activity in	No Yes
the next 6 months, will you begin within 30 days?	Does not apply (active now or don't plan to be)

## 8. How many days a week are you physically active for at least 30 minutes?

		•	•		•			
$\Box 0$	1	$\square 2$	3	4	5	6	7	

# **9.** Many people would like to be more physically active. What keeps you from being more active? (Please check all that apply)

I don't have time.
I don't have a good place in my home to be physically active.
I don't have a good place outside my home to be physically active.
I worry about my safety when I am physically active in my neighborhood.
Physical activity causes me to have pain.
My family and friends aren't active.
I am already as active as I want to be.
I don't want to be physically active.
Other

10. How many days a week would you be active (walk, run, bike, etc.) if nothing kept you from doing it?

	0						
0	$\Box 1$	$\Box 2$	3	4	5	6	7

11. How muc	ch time would you	spend being activ	e each day if notl	ning kept you from doing
it?				
No time	15 Minutes	30 Minutes	15 Minutes	More then 15 Minutes

	50 Williates	4.5 Williutes	145 Minutes

#### 12. How far would you walk (or run) for exercise and to go somewhere you want to go?

For Exercise	To Go Somewhere You Want To Go
Would not walk (or run) for exercise	Would not walk (or run) to go somewhere
$\Box$ Less than 1/2 mile	$\Box$ Less than 1/2 mile
$\Box$ 1/2 mile	$\Box$ 1/2 mile
1 mile	$\Box$ 1 mile
1 1/2 miles	$\Box$ 1 1/2 miles
$\Box$ 2 miles	$\square$ 2 miles
More than 2 miles	More than 2 miles

## **13.** What keeps you from walking or running more than you do? Check as many as you want.

Sidewalk problems (haven't been built, don't go where I want to go, or in bad condition)
Air problems (vehicle exhaust, fumes from businesses or other places, allergens in the air)
Lack of crosswalks
Lack of stoplights and walk signals
High speed traffic
Unsafe drivers
Noise from traffic
Unattractive views

Other\_\_\_\_

## 14. Would you be more likely to walk on a sidewalk if shrubs, plants and flowers were near it?

ne	ar	π.
	Ŋ	les

No No

# 15. Where would you want to go if you walked from the hospital? Check as many as you want.

Ponderosa
Cliff Hagans
Panda House
Giovanni's
Lee's
Wendy's
Applebee's
Food City
Perry County Tire
New Beginnings Day Care Center
Around the ARH property
Other places

Maybe

#### **16.** How is your health now?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- 🗌 Fair
- Poor

# 17. Has a doctor, nurse or other healthcare professional told you that walking would be good for your health?

Yes No Can't remember

### 18. Would a walking partner help increase the amount of your walking?

## No No

### **<u>19</u>**. Do you have someone to walk with you now?

|--|

## 20. How safe do you feel now while walking around the ARH property? Check once in the table below for daylight and once for dark.

Daylight	Dark
Very Safe	Very Safe
Somewhat Safe	Somewhat Safe
Neither Safe nor unsafe	Neither Safe nor unsafe
Somewhat unsafe	Somewhat unsafe
Very unsafe	Very unsafe

## 21. What is important to help you feel safe while walking around the ARH property on new sidewalks? Check all that apply for daylight and for dark.

Daylight	Dark
Nothing: I feel safe walking around ARH	Nothing: I feel safe walking around ARH
A barrier between cars and walkers	A barrier between cars and walkers
Crosswalks	Crosswalks
Stop signs for walkers to cross driving lanes	Stop signs for walkers to cross driving lanes
Extra lighting	Extra lighting
Traffic lights	Traffic lights
A walking partner	A walking partner
A security guard	A security guard
Nothing: I won't be walking	Nothing: I won't be walking

## 22. If new sidewalks are constructed near ARH, how important is each of these to you?

	Not	Slightly	Somewhat	Very
	Important	Important	Important	Important
	1	2	3	4
Good maintenance				
Barrier between cars and walkers				
Good lighting				
Wide sidewalk				
Crosswalks				
Stop signs or stoplights				
Interesting or useful destination				
Amount of traffic				
Safe environment				
Landscaping to keep cars away from walkers				
Landscaping for beauty				