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An evaluation of a pre-retirement programme and the perceived value for the inclusion of health and lifestyle information

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As the demographics of the UK changes, health practitioners and policy makers are faced with many challenges presented by a progressively aging population. With aging comes an increasing risk and prevalence of disease, illness and disability⁽¹⁾. Obesity is now more prevalent amongst older adults than their younger counterparts⁽²⁾. Promoting healthy aging is becoming a priority to delay the onset of disease and effective ways of communicating with this age group need to be identified. Retirement is a key life transition, often associated with reflection and re-ordering of an individuals’ lifestyle. Preparation for retirement may be an opportunity to provide health and lifestyle advice. Pre-retirement programmes currently delivered by the Scottish Pre-retirement Council (SPRC) include very little on lifestyle and health.

The aim of this survey was to explore the views of participants, on completion of the SPRC programme, regarding the potential inclusion of health and lifestyle information within future programmes. A self complete questionnaire was distributed to attendees of three SPRC pre-retirement courses in Glasgow, Scotland. Information was sought on reasons for attendance, opinions on current programme components and whether the inclusion of healthy eating, physical activity and stress management advice would have been valued. Participants were also asked to record their height and current weight and complete the validated Scottish physical activity questionnaire⁽³⁾.

All 77 course participants completed the questionnaire. Participants were predominantly female (70%), the majority of participants were aged 55–65 (80%). Forty percent were classified as either overweight or obese. The principal reason reported for attending the programme was for general information, the other two key incentives reported were for financial advice (17%) and as it was offered to them by an employer (22%). Only 1% reported health advice as being a motivator for participating in the course. Of those surveyed only one third valued the inclusion of healthy eating and stress management content, these people were significantly more likely to be overweight ($p = 0.04$). Forty-three per cent valued the inclusion of physical activity, these participants were significantly more likely to be overweight ($p = 0.026$). Eighty-seven percent of respondents reported meeting the current recommendations for physical activity.

Whilst recognising that preparation for retirement and its consequent lifestyle changes was important, only a minority of attendees of SPRC pre-retirement courses valued the inclusion of healthy aging advice. These findings may reflect a poor understanding of the influence of diet and physical activity in postponing the onset of chronic disease. Evidence suggests this is a group in need of intervention and future research should continue to determine the most effective means of engaging with those over the age of 50 to promote healthy aging.

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2. Gulland (2010) Obesity among over 65 s in UK reflects “lifetime of gaining weight”. *BMJ* 341:c3585
3. Lowther M, Mutrie N, Loughlan C, McFarlane C (1999) Development of a Scottish physical activity questionnaire: a tool for use in physical activity interventions. *Br J Sports Med* 33:244–249.