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Dear Editor,

Smarter Running!

The front cover of the November issue illustrates individuals taking part in a running event in a park and the same issue features Shah's paper on smartphone technology (ST). [1] With these two issues in mind, we were prompted to write. Parkrun' is a series of 5km runs taking place in towns and cities' across the UK. [2] Events are delivered by a network of local volunteers and held in public spaces [3] including parks and green environs. Importantly, activities provide participants of different abilities with an opportunity to be physically active (PA). [3] Many people have traditionally been put off from taking part in sports for a range of reasons, including their past experience. Yet research indicates that parkrun appeals to non-runners, with women, older adults and overweight people 'well represented' in adoption rates [3]

Events consider key design characteristics, important for helping people participate in PA. Parkruns are regular, so can be inbuilt into people's busy routines, local and take place in familiar natural environments. Research shows that while health and fitness benefits are important in facilitating initial engagement, social support, cohesion and helping others have also been reported as being influential in facilitating continued involvement [4]. Indeed, parkrun provides participants with regular and informal opportunities to take part in PA either on their own or with friends and family, whilst encouraging and rewarding the repeated behaviour. While running is not for everybody, over one million people have 'signed up' [5].

There is an increasing interest in the role of smart technology as an aid to facilitate increases in PA, including running, through a range of web-based and mobile applications. Parkrun have recently joined forces with the PA tracking app, Strava [5]. Amongst a host of potential benefits [5], runners can upload their parkrun time to their Strava profile, increasing the opportunity for social support and cohesion, and potentially facilitating continued PA engagement both in and outside of parkrun events. Importantly, Shah's paper offers a reminder of the need for further research

into the impact of ST interventions [1]. Outcomes emerging from such investigations could be important in shaping the behavioural change interventions of the future!

References

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