

# ***www.active-online.ch*: A TAILORED INTERVENTION PROGRAM FOR THE PROMOTION OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

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It is estimated that at least one third of the Swiss population is not active enough to meet current recommendations for health enhancing physical activity. Therefore, the promotion of physical activity is an element of growing importance in health promotion in Switzerland. "*active-online*" is an Internet-based intervention project with an interactive expert system (Velicer et al., 1993) for individually tailored motivation and advice regarding health enhancing physical activity. The theoretical framework for the expert system is the transtheoretical model of change (e.g. Velicer et al., 1993). Most of the existing expert systems have been developed for smoking cessation and have been implemented by paper and pencil. Only few programs target physical activity (Marcus et al., 1998) or use the world wide web as a medium for implementation. The concept of the project "*active-online*" and first evaluation results focusing on the acceptance of the website will be presented.

The website [www.active-online.ch](http://www.active-online.ch) is designed to target individuals of both genders between about 30 and 60 years of age who are not physically active on a regular basis. According to the current guidelines, the primary target behaviour in the expert system is physical activity with at least moderate intensity for at least half an hour a day. However, individuals who prefer vigorous exercise explicitly are counselled respectively. Participants are guided through several series of questions regarding behaviour, motivation and attitudes, each series being followed by an individualized and personalized feedback sequence. In the first version of the expert system, released in October 2000, only cross sectional data of the participants is used for feedback. An evaluation of its practicability and acceptance ended in January 2001. The second version will be developed until the end of 2001 and will include modules for strength and flexibility training as well as a library of rules, norms and feedback paragraphs for follow-up counselling. It will be tested again, adapted, and translated from German into French and Italian. This project is supported by five national partners.

In the evaluation period from November 1<sup>st</sup> 2000 until January 9<sup>th</sup> 2001, 1981 visits on the website were registered, 611 different individuals had logged into the expert system. 217 subjects had filled in the online-evaluation questionnaire *and* declared to have filled in the physical activity questionnaire "seriously". Of these 217 participants, 59.3% were males and 75% were between 30 and 60 years old. 38.6% were not active on a regular basis. 84.5% of those not active enough answered "yes" or "rather yes" to the question, if they thought that the program would help them to become more active. Participants appreciated most that they were addressed personally and individually, the empathic tonality, the simple and transparent structure of website and expert system and the simplicity of the graphic design. The most prominent critique was that the program was too general and offered no specific "recipes". For some individuals aspects of time consumption were a problem: For some, the entire program took too much time, for others the feedback sequences were too long or the download of the web pages was too slow.

The first evaluation results of the Internet-based intervention project "*active-online*" are encouraging. Even without specific PR measures, a considerable number of people could be reached with the test-version, individuals who were not active regularly even in a slightly over-representative proportion. The acceptance of the system was generally good, specific areas of improvement could be identified. For population wide implementations professional marketing strategies will be necessary.

## REFERENCES

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