



Standing Desks

Studying the benefit of standing desks for parole staff

Agency: Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (PADOC)

Project Duration:
12/12/18–02/06/19

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Context

Long-term sitting, such as in a desk job, has been associated with negative consequences to employee wellbeing.

Key Finding

There were no differences in participants' job satisfaction or perceptions of wellness or productivity, before and after the installation of standing desks; however, most participants expressed a desire to continue using the desk.

*BetaGov provides ongoing training to agency personnel to become research-savvy "Pracademics" who can lead trials.

Why BetaGov Spark?

Background

A large number of studies has indicated an association between sitting for extended periods of time and negative effects on both physical and psychological health. Some reports document that employees spend about 60% of their time at work sitting. There are no data on how much time PADOC staff at parole offices sit each day and whether time spent sitting is associated with differences in health measures, so PADOC implemented a pilot project to add a standing option to traditional desks and assess staff perceptions of the project.

Design

This small project was intended to gather staff perceptions about their work conditions, wellness, and the potential usefulness of a standing desk to provide an alternative to sitting for long durations. Ten randomly selected volunteers were assigned to have desks installed that could be adjusted to either sitting or standing. A log to document time standing and sitting at the desk and instructions on how to complete the log were provided to participants. All participants were also asked to complete surveys before (Time 1) and two months after (Time 2) the desks were installed. Surveys gathered self-reported job satisfaction and perceptions of wellness and productivity. The Time 2 surveys also asked specific questions about use of the desks and whether respondents identified any benefits or problems in using them.

Lessons Learned

Two participants withdrew immediately after installation of the desks reporting that the desks were uncomfortable. They did not complete the

Time 2 survey. A third participant did not complete the Time 2 survey, but no specific reason was given. Of the seven surveys received, most participants used the desks at least an hour each day (one did not use it at all; three used it 1–3 hours/day, and two used it for 4–8 hours/day). Most participants also reported that they experienced a boost in energy when using the desks. ("Did you get a boost in energy when using the desks?": Two reported very much, four reported some, and one reported no boost in energy.) Additionally, six of the seven respondents reported enjoying the use of the desks, and six reported that they would like to continue using them. Despite wanting to continue using the desks, all of the respondents reported having some problem with the desk although the specific problems were not identified.

Next Steps

Survey findings from those testing the desks reveal a variety of perspectives. Some staff found the desks beneficial while others did not like them, including two who withdrew from the trial immediately after the desks were installed. It would be helpful to gather additional details about why or how a participant opted not to continue to use the desk immediately after installation, which might identify for whom the desks might not be appropriate. For example, limits to extension height might interfere with any benefit of the desk. Although this was only a small pilot to gather feedback to inform future purchases of standing desks, important information was collected that suggests that the desks may not be appropriate or beneficial for everyone. With this in mind, the Department might want to offer staff the desks on a trial basis before purchasing them for all who indicate a desire to use them.

Sometimes a rigorous trial of an innovative idea just isn't possible, but with a Spark project a practitioner can learn important information about the idea, the agency, and the sample. What's more, a positive signal may inform a future randomized controlled trial and more definitive results. Spark projects meet Pracademics where they are comfortable—giving them the opportunity to learn about research and apply that learning to internal research projects.