

# Examining the Effectiveness of the Physical Activity Health Education Program for Persons with Multiple Sclerosis (HEMS): A Qualitative Examination

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## Introduction

- Multiple sclerosis (MS) is an auto-immune disease affecting 400,000 people in the United States
- Physical Activity (PA) has been demonstrated to improve quality of life for persons with MS
- HEMS is a theoretically based program that aims to increase participation
  - No evaluation of the program for participant feedback has been completed

## Purpose

- To complete focus groups with participants who completed the HEMS program to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of the program

## Methods

### Participants

- Eight HEMS participants
- 75% Female
- Mean age: 59
- MS Type: Relapsing remitting (88%); Secondary progressive (12%)

### Procedures

- Two groups completed a 60 minute focus group discussion
- Questions explored:
  - Usefulness of the program content
  - Presentation program materials
  - Barriers & adherence to the program
  - Data collection procedures

### Qualitative Analysis

- Investigator Triangulation – Perspectives from three coders to establish trustworthiness
- Critical friend – Staff separate from triangulation reviewed themes

*"The idea of looking at PA as counting as an exercise is helpful for me"*  
 –HEMS Participant



*"If I set goals, physical activity goals but other goals as well, if I set them then I reach many of them. If I don't set them I seem to get far less accomplished"*  
 –HEMS Participant

*"I used to work out by myself all the time, but it helps to have someone to be accountable to, to help you through and change things up"*  
 –HEMS Participant

*"Goal setting have always worked for me so one thing I learned in here is that the goal or prize could be something like painting a room in your home"*  
 –HEMS Participant

*"I don't think there's a real level of understanding of where we are coming from all the time"*  
 –HEMS Participant

## Results

### HEMS Meta-Themes

#### Effectiveness of Program

- Goal setting
- Environment: Supportive & open environment
- Structure of program
- Social support

#### Improvement of program

- Measurement tools: Activity logs & pedometer
- Additional self-compassion component

#### Barriers to PA

- Disability: cognitive, physical limitations, and fatigue
- Accessibility: transportation
- Environment: weather
- Knowledge: Lack of knowledge about PA & lack of social support

#### Facilitators or Motivators

- Social support
- Self efficacy may increase PA
- Goal setting
- Access to MS exercise clinic

#### Knowledge of PA

- Overcoming barriers
- Plans for future PA
- Intentions

## Conclusion

- Overall, the participants found HEMS useful with the assessment tools/procedures needing the most improvement.
- Based on the focus group findings, the HEMS program could be modified to include:
  - Additional module covering nutrition
  - Modified activity logs
  - Rearrangement of scheduling of HEMS program
  - Implement mentor program