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Barriers and determinants of pre-registered nurses and medics participation in physical activity

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Background: A high proportion of pre-registered healthcare professionals do not achieve recommended daily levels of physical activity, and report barriers to exercise including high levels of stress.

Aims: To assess the physical activity levels of pre-registered nurses and medics and determine patterns of barriers and determinants of exercise participation.

Methods: Online questionnaire survey was conducted with 361 pre-registered nursing (n=193) and medical students (n=168) at a teaching hospital site. Measures included the International Physical Activity Questionnaire, Benefits and Barriers to Exercise Scale, Self-Efficacy for Exercise Scale, Perceived Stress Scale and Social Support for Exercise Scale.

Results: Pre-registered nurses were less likely to be 'active' than pre-registered medics (35.8% compared to 47.7%). Medics perceived significantly greater benefits to exercise (nurses: M=85.06; SD=11.295; medics: M=87.18; SD=10.939) and fewer barriers to exercise (nurses: M=35.56; SD=6.004; medics: M=36.31, SD=5.859). Medics reported greater social support for physical activity from family (nurses: M=25.21, SD=11.106; medics: M=29.41, SD=11.103) and friends (nurses: M=28.72, SD=11.762; medics: M=33.12,

SD=10.366) than nurses. For both, greater physical activity was associated with high self-efficacy for exercise, greater perceived support for exercise and increased perceived benefits of exercise. Barriers to exercise specific to healthcare students were raised. Stress levels were higher amongst pre-registered nurses than medics, but stress was not associated with physical activity participation.

Conclusion: Many pre-registered healthcare professionals are not active enough to benefit their health; barriers to exercise may be different for student nurses than for medics. Findings will help to develop tailored services for health promotion in university hospital settings.