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Why we . . . deskercise

Practice manager Joan Hughson talks to **Helen Jones** about how she got her colleagues moving and boosted team morale

Helen Jones

“Our Shetland health improvement officer Joanna Inkster told us about ‘deskercise’—exercises we could do at work developed by Claire Morris from NHS Shetland Health Improvements,” says Joan Hughson. “So, we decided to try it out to take a break from our screens and integrate some activity into our day.”

Every day at 10.45 am a group gets together in the Scalloway Health Centre’s admin room to do some exercises before their tea break at 11 am.

“We block off our diaries and send a reminder message so that whoever wants to come along, can do so,” practice manager Hughson explains. “There are usually between four and six of us—mostly the administration team—and doctors and practice nurses join us if they have time.”

There are 10 sets of exercises available on the NHS Shetland intranet from which participants can pick five that can be done for 30 seconds each with a 30 second march in between. The team at Scalloway Health Centre does a range of these exercises and has developed some of its own.

“We do jumping jacks, squats, desk push ups, desk triceps, and wall squats, among other things,” says Hughson. “During lockdown we’ve been watching PE with Joe Wicks on YouTube and so we’re doing lunges and ‘spideys’—Spiderman moves. We’ve also introduced ‘freestyle Fridays’ where you do a dance or whatever you want to.”

Hughson says that the practice has generally been enthusiastic about deskercise. “At first, some thought it was a disruption to their day, but over time people have joined us and they come and have a warm-up. It’s not for everyone, but people are happy that we do it.”

The benefits to the team’s health and wellbeing have been tangible. “It keeps us all fitter and means we have less ‘brain fog’ because it takes us away from our screens for a little while,” Hughson says.

“It also gets the team together with the doctors and practice nurses when time allows and builds morale—particularly during lockdown. We’ve observed social distancing while we’ve been doing it and it’s kept us talking and gives us something to laugh about,” she says. “I really recommend it to others.”

View from a GP: Chloe Evans on the benefits of deskercise

“I’m a locum GP working between Shetland and Oxford. I join the sessions that Joan organises if I’m in Scalloway and I’m free. It’s really good fun and makes us laugh.

“It also gets us moving when we’ve been sitting—which is particularly good if it’s a cold day. And during coronavirus, with so many phone and video consultations, it’s great to move a little in the day as I’m no longer going back and forth fetching patients from the waiting room.

“Sometimes if I’m back in Oxford and not working, then I join in on WhatsApp. I enjoy the chance to get together with the team in a fun way—it’s good for teamwork and morale.”

How to make the change

- There are many deskercise routines available online that you can follow. Or, like Scalloway, you can create your own. Get ideas from YouTube fitness instructors such as Joe Wicks
- Set aside a regular time in your calendar every day—10 minutes is enough—to do a few simple exercises that will make a difference
- Try to do desk exercises with colleagues rather than alone so that you can encourage each other.