

Why healthcare professionals should know a little about infographics

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Infographics is an abbreviated term for an information graphic. Information is presented in a logical manner, similar to storytelling, using data visualisations, text and pictures.¹ Statistically, the most successful infographics, in terms of number of 'shares' on social media, contain an average of 396 words² and a combination of data visualisations (bar graphs, line graphs and pie charts) and illustrations. Although 396 words may seem like an inadequate amount of text for researchers to convey their findings comprehensively, when considering this in the infographics context, the saying, 'a picture tells a thousand words', comes to mind. Three days after learning new information, we are likely to remember up to 6.5 times more through learning from an infographic than by reading text alone.¹ Many industries, such as the business, food, finance and healthcare sectors, as well as politics, make use of infographics, as does physical activity promotion. Infographics can be used as decision-aids and to make complex topics more easily understood by members of the public.

However, the impact and accuracy of existing infographics are highly variable. Many are published on social media once or twice, then quickly forgotten. Successful infographics should be part of a well thought out dissemination plan, and if shared and reshared repeatedly on social media, their use will build campaign impact and increase audience reach. The more people who see an infographic, the more it can be talked about and its key messages shared. As healthcare professionals and researchers, we are good at creating content, but perhaps we could gain by making the information engaging, widely seen and sticky, like the hit video 23½ hours (worth a watch if you have not already seen it).³

In the UK, adults are not as physically active as those in other European

countries, and we thus seek successful strategies to disseminate key messages from our physical activity policies.⁴ An infographic designed by the UK's Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) was launched in 2015 to accompany the physical activity guidelines document 'Start Active, Stay Active', first published in 2011⁵ (figure 1). This infographic is an excellent example of transmitting a message and engaging the reader through a three-step process of 'raising awareness', 'changing and challenging attitudes' and providing a 'call to action' for individuals to change their behaviour and become more physically active.⁶ Initial distribution of the CMOs' infographic was aimed at doctors, nurses, general practitioner surgeries, charities and allied health professionals, but a wider audience has been reached through digital transmission via social media and the use of the hashtag '#sitlessmove-more'.⁷ A second infographic outlining physical activity recommendations for children and young people was launched in March 2016 (figure 2).

Health infographics are designed to stimulate the following responses from readers—'attention, comprehension, recall and adherence'.⁸ The design of the CMOs' infographic was set out in clear terms, allowing members of the public to understand its message without requiring explanation from health professionals as it did not contain complex medical terminology.

A SUCCESSFUL INFOGRAPHIC GETS PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT ITS MESSAGE AND SHARING IT MORE WIDELY

An infographic succeeds if people feel their attention drawn to it and are able to comprehend the information presented. They may consider behaviour change themselves, and/or share the messages with their networks. Infographics can build a bridge between lay people and health professionals, and help important points to be better understood and acted on.

In short, the infographic is a helpful tool for communicating key messages clearly, changing attitudes and even challenging people to change behaviours or the way they think. Perhaps each research paper should produce an infographic!

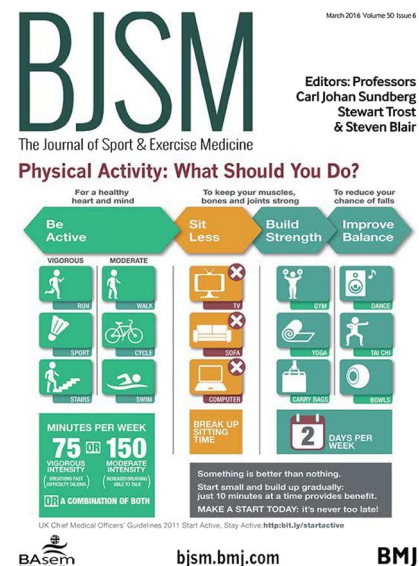


Figure 1 UK Chief Medical Officer adult guidelines infographic 2015, used as the cover for *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, March 2016.

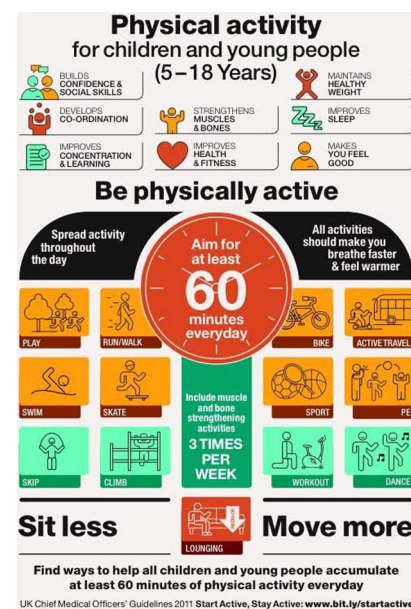


Figure 2 Infographic for children and young people.

Twitter Follow Christopher Oliver at @CyclingSurgeon and Andrew Murray at @docandrewmurray

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