

# Golf for Health

Update  
prepared for  
ISPS Handa  
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In partnership with :



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# Introduction

The University of St Andrews is grateful to ISPS Handa for their generous gift of £55,000 in support of the EAGLE project – a pioneering collaborative study between the School of Medicine and R&A, working with partner organisations PGA, European tour, Movement for Health, Scottish Golf, Fife Golf Trust, and European Ladies tour.

Physical inactivity is associated with one in six deaths in the UK and costs the nation’s economy £7.4 billion per year, while participation in golf is known to increase physical activity levels and improve physical and mental health and wellbeing. The EAGLE project, therefore, is designed to improve the health of the public and encourage a more active lifestyle through a social prescription to golf, a sport which research has revealed that participation in can help prevent and treat 40 major chronic diseases, including diabetes, heart attacks, strokes, breast and colon cancer, depression and dementia.

Phase 1 of the EAGLE study implemented a co-design process to determine connection pathways from primary care and community services to a free golf programme, named Golf for Health. Seven potential pathways – which can broadly be termed as ‘social prescribing’ – were identified, enabled through primary care, community link workers, and community services. Social prescribing is expected to enhance sign up and participation in programmes as people are referred to programmes through trusted or known figures and organisations. Phase 2, the focus of this report, aimed to implement and evaluate these connection pathways.



2022 Golf for Health Participants

# Golf for Health

Golf for Health is a free programme for adults aged 18 years and over who are not currently meeting the physical activity guidelines of 150 minutes per week, as determined by the UK Government and, more broadly, the World Health Organisation. Participants were required to be new to golf or to have not played in over two years.

GP practices in Fife were invited to take part in the pilot study, with participating practices linked with local golf clubs offering eight hours of coaching from a PGA professional, tailored to the needs and abilities of the group. The programme also included substantial social elements, which created a welcoming and inclusive environment and also helped to dispel the elitist myths that surround golf.

Four clubs across Fife have provided Golf for Health since August 2022, in Dunfermline, Kirkcaldy and Cupar, and participants came together in small groups of 4-6, which facilitated greater time with the professionals. The required equipment is provided throughout the programme, and work is underway to offer discounts for further participation at the clubs, to ensure prolonged engagement with golf.

## Connection Pathways

The seven potential connection pathways identified in Phase 1 were targeted to clinicians and other staff working in primary care, including GPs, nurses and physiotherapists, as well as community link practitioners. To date, five GP practices and three community link workers have been involved in the connection and referral of patients to Golf for Health. A further two GP practices have signed up and will participate in the future phase.

GP practices and community link workers opted to try four of the seven pathway options provided, being:

- Advertisement in practice/practice website/social media
- Verbal signposting with information leaflet/booklet
- Golf for Health prescription
- Practice/healthcare professional aides' referral to Golf for Health (online form)

A fifth option was considered and implemented by GP practices only: referral to community link workers, to act as an intermediary.

To support the connection pathways, a number of materials were developed, including a poster, leaflet, prescription pad, registration form, and registration website. When working to build relationships and implement the connection pathways, it was suggested to broaden the scope to also include community groups and services. In doing so, three community groups were involved in the referral, all of which had a focus on individuals with a chronic illness or other vulnerability.

# Are you ready to get more active and meet new people ?

Did you know – playing golf has a range of physical, mental and social benefits.

Golf for Health could be for you - A relaxed programme, giving you the opportunity to **try out golf in a friendly environment.**

Golf for Health is a free programme at a number of clubs in Fife for NHS Fife patients who haven't played before or haven't played for quite some time.

No need to wear anything fancy and **all equipment will be provided.**

## Programme includes:

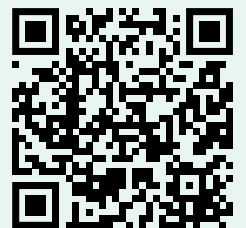
- 8 group lessons with PGA Professional/coaching staff
- Small group sizes (max 10)
- Equipment provided
- Follow on offers

Speak to someone in your GP practice and sign up here today

<https://scottishgolf.org/golf-for-health-fife>



# Golf for Health



# Evaluation

Evaluation thus far has broadly comprised of interviews, focus groups and online surveys and has focused on the acceptability of implementing and navigating the connections pathways, as well as the experience of participating in and providing Golf for Health from the perspective of both patients and professionals.

The referrals target was set at 10 patients per club (in total, 40 patients in this referral period) and to date, there have been 32 referrals. This number is expected to increase in the next phase to reach a total of 60 referrals.

Chart of referral rates: Actual vs expected



## GP Practices

Clinicians and staff at GP practices were positive and enthusiastic about the programme, valuing the benefits of social participation and sport, and recognising that patients and the community can benefit from such initiatives.

Feedback from GP practices regarding the implementation of the pathways was generally positive, with an emphasis on the benefit of the prescription pad and acknowledgement of their role in the process.

However, it was also acknowledged that GP practices are under considerable pressure and have limited time available in consultations, therefore other clinicians and staff were involved in the referrals, including nurses and receptionists. The scheme was further expanded to include community services and wider advertisement on the recommendation of a GP, to enable more self-referrals to the scheme. This highlights the collaborative nature of the project and the buy-in from the community.

## Participants

As with GP practices, feedback from participants was very positive. It was clear they had gained more than a new skill, although for many this was a key benefit. People took part who had never thought of playing golf before and immensely enjoyed the experience, feeling included and part of a group. Many had mental health issues or suffered from chronic illnesses, including respiratory conditions, ME and anxiety/depression. Some were worried about joining alone or not being able to actually play golf but, for most, after attending the first session these issues were addressed.

An emphasis was placed on fun and social participation throughout the four programmes, which was well received. Many participants are keen to continue playing golf and appropriate follow-on options are being explored to harness their newfound interest in golf and achieve sustained improvements in their health and wellbeing.



Focus group at participating golf club

Feedback from participants included:

- *“I thought it would be good to do something that was a total switch off because I suffer from high anxiety and severe depression, and I’m very busy at work, and I’d have never thought of golf before... but it gave me an hour to myself and I plan to carry this on”*
- *“Now semi-retired, Golf for Health gave me assistance to return to a sport which I have not played for 30 years. Following Cardiac surgery, I was unsure of my ability... I now feel more confident and motivated.”*
- *“My upper arm movement has improved. My left hand still struggled with gripping. The pro suggested changing for chunkier grips and that’s helped.”*
- *“I’ll tell you what was really good, meeting others and now we have a WhatsApp group so we can continue to play golf”*
- *“It was a very welcoming situation, especially for single females.”*

## Golf Professionals

The final group considered through the evaluation was the golf professionals – those who led and facilitated the programme at the different clubs. It was clear the professionals really enjoyed providing the programme and could see the benefits for participants, as well as the clubs. However, it was also noted that the programme was running quite differently across the four clubs and so further work is required to build a more standardised programme for testing at a wider scale. Professionals involved are on board with this and will actively contribute to the development of the programme before commencing Phase 3.

## Celebrating Success

On 18 November 2022, a celebration event was held at Dunnikier Golf Club and Cluny Activities, Kirkcaldy. The event was well-attended by all involved in Golf for Health, including coaches and participants. An opportunity was provided to share the impact of Golf for Health, including pieces to camera for a film discussing the project. The stories illuminated the benefits of such a programme, particularly for those who may be suffering from mental health issues.

Participants commented that Golf for Health had provided them with the chance to take time out of the day and enjoy an activity where that was the sole focus. It was clear that a real social bond had been formed and there was a sense of excitement and a real understanding of the potential of the programme.



Participants, golf professionals and members of partnership organisations attend the celebration event



## Future Plans

Further work is required to establish and build on the connection pathways implemented, as well as some standardisation of the programme. Although tailoring of the programme was key in Phase 2, it is now necessary to work with the Golf Professionals to build a more detailed overview of expected programme elements, to ensure fidelity and enable testing in any future large trial.

In addition, further potential means of connection have been identified when working through phase 2, which will now be implemented and evaluated between February and March 2023. After completion of Phase 3 and analysis of all data collected, a grant application for a large scale trial will be developed and submitted to an appropriate awarding body. This trial will build on the results of the previous stages to progress the programme.

Referral pathways for those in the general population suffering from mental health issues, chronic health conditions or recent serious health events like heart attacks or strokes will also be developed. The project will work to make the greatest difference possible within the groups, connection pathways and programme. It is anticipated this will have a positive impact on the mental and physical health of those involved but will also identify connection pathways to such programmes, creating a blueprint for similar work moving forward.

## Project Budget

To date, the EAGLE study has utilised over £32,000 of the generous funding from ISPS Handa:

Item	Expenditure
Salaries	£31,285
Research costs	£540
Participant remittance	£480
<b>Total</b>	<b>£32,305</b>

To enable the progression of the project, the remaining funds will be used to expand the team. An administrator will be recruited to work on the day-to-day running of the project, including raising its profile and sharing information. A PhD student, funded for three years, will also be recruited to work on developing and evaluating the programme in more detail, building the case for future funding and expansion.



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#### Programme includes:

- 8 group lessons with PGA
- Professional/coaching staff
- Small group sizes (max 10)
- Equipment
- Follow on offers

<https://scottishgolf.org/golf-for-health-life>



Golf For Health



In partnership with:



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Images courtesy of Golf for Health

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