

# Prescribing Parks and Nature

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# Outline

- What are park/nature prescription programs?
- Brief history
- Organizing at the national level
- What is the evidence?

# Park and Nature Prescriptions

- Diverse range of prescriptions for parks and nature
- A prescription is “an instruction written by a medical practitioner that authorizes a patient to be issued a medicine or treatment”
  - In this case, the “medicine or treatment” are parks/nature
- Prescribers include primary and secondary health care providers as well as allied health professionals
- Prescription programs usually include more than just the prescription itself

# Brief History

- Nonmedical prescriptions are not new
  - Physicians have prescribed exercise for health since ancient Greece
- Value of parks to public health has been understood since the Victorian era
- Contemporary notion of nonmedical prescriptions began with prescriptions for food and parents reading aloud to children
- Widespread “social prescription” involving outdoor physical activity began in the 1990s

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# Urban to Rural Transition in Prescription Programs

- Initially, park and nature prescription programs were focused in urban areas (such as ParkRx)
  - Prescribing urban parks, trails, and greenways
- With recent exposure to the public health concerns of rural populations, ParkRx programs started in rural areas
- Translation of successful urban public health interventions to rural areas is common, but potentially problematic

# National-Level Involvement

- American Academy of Pediatrics
- American College of Sports Medicine
- American Medical Association
- American Public Health Association
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- National Parks Service
  - Healthy Parks, Healthy People

# Foundation Involvement from Insurance Companies

- Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina
- Blue Cross Blue Shield of South Carolina
- United Health Group
- Kaiser Permanente

# Evidence on Effectiveness of Park/Nature Prescriptions

- Research indicates that park and nature prescription programs may:
  - increase awareness of the health benefits of exposure to nature
  - buffer against life stress
- Data on:
  - change in behavior is mixed
  - adherence to prescriptions is lacking
  - however several large-scale studies are being conducted
- More studies have been conducted on exercise and physical activity prescriptions



# Perspectives of Health Care Providers

- Many health care providers:
  - Are aware of the health benefits of spending time in nature and outdoor physical activity (PA)
    - But not necessarily ParkRx programs
  - See themselves as role models for outdoor PA for patients
  - See importance of tailoring discussion of outdoor PA to each patient and family
    - Family barriers seen as primary reason why health care providers may not write a prescription
    - Providers will not write a prescription for something they do not think the patient has the ability to comply with or fill