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## Why healthcare professionals should know a little about infographics

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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 words [2] and a combination of data visualisations (bar graphs, line graphs, pie charts) and illustrations. 396 words may seem like an inadequate amount of text for many researchers to convey their findings comprehensively, but the saying, "a picture tells a thousand words", comes to mind. 3 days after learning new information, we are likely to remember up to 6.5 times more through learning from an infographic than reading text alone [1]. Many industries make use of infographics, such as business, politics, food, finance, and healthcare, including 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 is 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 again and again on social media will build campaign impact and increase audience reach. The more people who see an infographic, the more who can talk about and share its important message. 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 *23 and ½ hours* (worth a watch if you haven't seen it) [3].

In the UK our people are not physically active adults compared with 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 2011 [5] [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, GP 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 '#sitlessmovemore' [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 they can help important points be understood better, and acted upon.

In short, infographics are 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!

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