GET UP! GET OUT! GET ACTIVE!

If you were offered a daily pill that could reduce your risk of Type 2 diabetes, cancer, heart disease and stroke, give you a healthy dose of vitamin D, help you lose weight, tone up and increase your stamina, would you take it? The answer is sure to be “yes” but before you search for this new wonder drug, here is the best bit: the benefits are all yours with a brisk daily walk. Even if you are physically inactive now, just 30 minutes of brisk walking five days a week is enough to lower your risk of suffering an early death by up to 30pc.

A new website was launched in early September to highlight accessible walking routes for staff, visitors and patients in Galway City Hospitals.

By changing the work environment to include accessible walking routes, we can help to raise awareness of the many benefits of physical activity to one’s health and wellbeing. Walking is a great way for non-exercisers to begin an activity programme, as it is free, accessible and we already know how to do it.

This is the reason Health Promotion and Improvement and the Saolta University Health Care Group identified and highlighted various internal and external accessible walking routes on both hospital sites in Galway City, on the grounds of GUH and Merlin Park University hospitals.

In early September, to coincide with the hospital step challenge for staff and ‘Culture Night’, a new website was launched called www.HospitalWalks.com. These hospital walks are colour-coded and measured in relation to step count, distance in kms and duration—walking at a modest pace.

The website clearly highlights interactive maps, slide shows and photos of all the routes, to ensure clarity and accessibility for all. The website also contains links to Get Ireland Active, Get Ireland Walking and other relevant websites to support staff, patients and visitors to become more active, more often.

It is hoped that the website and promotional material will support all hospital staff, patients and visitors to avail of opportunities at work and while visiting the hospitals to integrate more physical activity into their daily routine by engaging in short physical activity walks.

The walks in Merlin Park University Hospital were named after central figures in the hospital’s history such as:

- Dr. Noel Browne – the Minister for Health who built this hospital as a TB sanatorium.
- Dr. Norman White – the architect who was keen that every patient would get to see every tree and shrub and hence he incorporated wonderful views of nature into the design plans.
- TheWalshman’s – the Walshmans were the owners of the property (estate) which was taken over by compulsory acquisition in order to build a sanatorium and they were very upset at the time but felt if they could save one life it would be worth it.

The Hitchcock walk—Dr. Hitchcock worked in MPUH and wrote the book ‘TB or not TB’

The Kneafsey Walk—Dr. Kneafsey was a revolutionary Cardio-thoracic surgeon at MPUH.

Staff can now set their own activity goals and begin to indulge in some of these short walks early in the morning or at lunch time in the hospital grounds or indeed by simply getting off the bus early and walking the rest of the way to work. They will begin to reap the many health benefits of being active on a personal level but also enjoy the many social benefits. Taking part in a lunch time walking group is a great way to support people to stay motivated and reach their goals.

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