

SOCIETY *of* BEHAVIORAL MEDICINE

Better Health Through Behavior Change

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE

6:30 p.m. EST

Friday, April 25, 2014

CONTACT

Arlen Moller

Illinois Institute of Technology

312.567.3503 (office), amoller@iit.edu

Mark Zonca

Senior Director of Communications

312.567.3155 (office), mzonca1@iit.edu

Fantasy Sports Meet Real World Fitness

Leveraging Online Fantasy Sports to Promote Physical Activity

Philadelphia, PA - The popularity of online fantasy sports has skyrocketed over the last decade. In 2013 alone, nearly 34 million Americans participated, an audience that includes roughly 19 percent of the adult (12+) male population according to the Fantasy Sports Trade Association. The average participant plays for 8.7 hours per week. Ironically, as traditionally conceived, this game involves attending to the physical activity data generated by professional athletes, yet is entirely sedentary for those playing.

Dr. Arlen Moller, Associate Professor of Psychology at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT), saw this popularity and irony as an opportunity. Together with his research team, he has developed and begun testing a system for incorporating participants' real world physical activity into online fantasy games, a form of active video game (AVG) they hope can promote greater physical activity among sedentary adults.

"A basic principle of this research involves taking people's enduring enthusiasm for professional sports and leveraging that enthusiasm to help them become more physically active themselves," says Dr. Moller. "In online fantasy sports, message boards attract a high degree of social interaction. For many people, the conversations on these message boards are an enjoyable and important reason for participating," added Dr. Moller.

Social support from peers has also been identified as being one of the strongest predictors of success in programs designed to promote physical fitness. The opportunities for social interaction, Dr. Moller notes, is one of the key reasons we feel online fantasy sports may be a gaming platform particularly well-suited to helping encourage healthy behavior change.

In a pilot of Dr. Moller's "augmented fantasy sports" intervention conducted during the summer of 2013, participants wore a low-cost accelerometer designed to objectively assess their physical activity on a daily basis. After a baseline-recording period, Moller gave participants individually calibrated weekly goals, increasing their activity each week until all of them were targeting the recommended level of physical activity. If they met that goal, they would attain privileges within the online fantasy sports game. Dr. Moller says the most important aspect of that study was that each participant's activity results were recorded on a league online message board, a feature designed to stimulate online discussion. At the conclusion of the 14-week study, on average, participants increased their average steps per day by

more than 30 percent – from 8,678 steps per day during baseline measurement to 11,364 steps per day during the season.

Study results will be presented by Dr. Moller at a poster session at 6:25 p.m. EST, Friday, April 25, during the 2014 Society of Behavioral Medicine’s Annual Meeting and Scientific Sessions in Philadelphia, PA. The poster is titled: “Batter up! Feasibility of leveraging fantasy sports leagues to promote physical activity.”

Authors: Arlen C. Moller (IIT & Northwestern University), Sara Majewski (IIT), Rebecca Carson (IIT), Biruk Eyesus (IIT), and Kristin L. Schneider (Rosalind Franklin University). A two-minute video summarizing these findings was entered into the Society of Behavioral Medicine Video Contest, and can be viewed here: <http://youtu.be/ma4kGN8vx8g>.

Author Disclosure: The lead author (Moller) is also the sole author of a U.S. Patent Application currently under review at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (filed on December 3, 2013), titled: “Incorporating objective assessments of fantasy-team-owners’ physical activity into fantasy sport platforms” (Serial No. 14/088,632). The above referenced intellectual property belongs to the Illinois Institute of Technology. For the other authors of this manuscript (Majewski, Carson, Eyesus, & Schneider), there are no financial or other conflicts of interests.

About The Society of Behavioral Medicine:

The Society of Behavioral Medicine (www.sbm.org) is a multidisciplinary organization of clinicians, educators, and scientists dedicated to promoting the study of the interactions of behavior with biology and the environment and the application of that knowledge to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and populations.

This study was presented during the 2014 Annual Meeting and Scientific Session of the Society of Behavioral Medicine (SBM) from April 23-26, 2014 in Philadelphia, PA. However, it does not reflect the policies or the opinion of the SBM. This symposium presentation was held on April 25th. Given that this study was presented at a scientific meeting, the data and conclusions reached should be regarded as preliminary, until they are published in a peer-reviewed journal. Funding agencies played no role in this study. There are no conflicts of interest for the investigators.

About IIT:

Founded in 1890, Illinois Institute of Technology is a Ph.D.-granting university, located in Bronzeville on Chicago’s South Side, with more than 7,800 students in engineering, science, architecture, design, applied technology, human sciences, business and law. Total enrollment in Fall 2013 was the highest since 1968- and the Fall 2013 full-time undergraduate enrollment was the largest since 1981. Visit www.iit.edu.

###