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Less carrot more stick: promoting health behavior change with deposit contracts

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Propositions for the dissertation

Less carrot more stick: promoting health behavior change with deposit contracts

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1. Modern day living conditions of humans are associated with a widespread lack of physical activity. "Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it." (Plato, 380 BC)
2. "Behavior is shaped and maintained by its consequences" (Skinner, 1953), and tweaking the consequences of health behavior can help shape and maintain healthy lifestyles
3. Financial rewards (*carrots*) are effective in changing health behavior while they are in place. Yet, when financial rewards are removed, behavior typically drops back to - but not below - baseline levels (Mantzari et al., 2015)
4. Deposit contracts (*sticks*) allow people to deposit their own money as an incentive. This might remove a barrier for large scale implementation (Jeffery, 2012), because deposit contracts do not require external funding of incentives
5. Deposit contracts (*sticks*) and financial rewards (*carrots*) offered in a smartphone app can produce meaningful increases in daily step counts (this dissertation)
6. Deposit contracts will not reach everyone, but more people will be reached when the deposit amounts are matched or customizable (this dissertation)
7. Deposit contracts should preferably be started as a New Year's Resolution, because the clean slate provided by the passage of the year might increase the odds of success (this dissertation)
8. Healthcare professionals are generally positive towards using financial incentives that promote lifestyle change among people with cardiovascular disease. However, they also have important concerns which can be mitigated through thoughtful incentive design (this dissertation)
9. Many people with cardiovascular disease need extra commitment to sustain their lifestyle change, but only a small group appears willing to use deposit contracts to this end (this dissertation)
10. Despite fundamental differences in their aims and methods, collaboration between research and industry can provide value to society by generating ecologically valid knowledge and applying this knowledge in the real world
11. Aligning a research timeline and software development roadmap can lead to roadblocks. Roadblocks can be overcome by taking a detour. A detour taken by foot can improve one's health
12. When you expect to hear sirens singing, make sure your ears are plugged and your hands are tied (adapted from Homer, 8th century BC)