

Doctors in Michigan city are treating patients by sending them to local parks

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Nature is becoming a form of medicine in west Michigan.

Under a new initiative, Park Rx America, doctors are prescribing visits

to local parks along with more traditional medicine to boost [patient health](#).

The [pilot program](#) is a partnership between Park Rx America, the Ottawa County Parks, the City of Holland, Holland Charter Township, Park Township, Laketown Township and the Outdoor Discovery Center .

The initiative is led by Dr. Beth Peter of Lakewood Family Medicine in Holland.

"The PHO (Holland Physician Hospital Organization) is always searching for resources we can give our physicians to help them motivate their patients to make important habit changes so they are healthier, feel better, and are less stressed," Peter in said a news release. "Park Rx America is one we're really excited about."

Jessica VanGinhoven, Ottawa County Parks communications specialist, said about 80 parks in and around Holland have been registered under Park Rx America. VanGinhoven said practitioners have a database they use to find parks that fit the patients needs.

"They can filter them by walkways and bathrooms," VanGinhoven said. "We hope it expands."

Anyone can visit Park Rx America's website to view the parks. According to its website, the nonprofit organization incorporated more than 8,000 parks in 34 states for practitioners. Physicians can register through the website to prescribe parks to their patients.

"As a city and region, we know parks are a critical element to contributing to the high quality of life our area offers, this is a neat program where those same parks can also contribute to our residents'

health," Holland City Manager Keith Van Beek said in an email.

Discussion of nature as a healer continues to be a major topic with a 2019 study conducted by University of Michigan researchers MaryCarol Hunter, Brenda Gillespie and Sophie Yu-Pu Chen.

The study, released in April, suggested that at least 20 minutes of physical activity outside or interacting with nature can reduce health issues such as stress, heart disease, blood pressure, and weight.

The study also suggested that an additional 10 minutes—a total of 30 minutes—results in an even more dramatic decrease in stress.

Hunter told the Free Press in April that the study was developed for health care practitioners to utilize when giving patients a "nature-pill prescription."

"For a while, people have been trying to put a number on how much nature is needed," Hunter said. "Health care professionals have different answers."

Hunter suggested people even start with five minutes outside and "see where it takes you."

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