

“Obesity and work absence”

Authors

Anita Dyb Linge (*Muritunet/Valldal-Norway*), Wivi Andersen (*Nasjonale Kompetansetjeneste for Arbeidsretta Rehabilitering/Rauland-Norway*)

Introduction

The increase in overweight and obesity is one of the biggest health challenges in Norway. Recent studies indicate that a high body mass index is correlated with longer periods of work absence and is also directly connected to long-term sick leave above seven days¹. Few studies have been done about obesity, lifestyle change and work participation. The primary goal of this study has been to find out whether there is a difference in work ability between participants in the different interventions. The aim has been to gain knowledge of the experiences of participants with obesity in a life style intervention with or without a work dimension.

Methods

The study was designed as a randomized controlled study with an exploring prospective design. It lasted 12 months and each patient had three visits (baseline, 6 and 12 month) at a rehabilitation centre, each lasting 4-2-2 weeks. Data material gathered at each stay consisting from foams, test, journal and individual interviews.

140 participants become randomized in two interventions, with and without work focus. 99 participants completed the study and are the basis for the results. Data material has been collected at the rehabilitation centre Muritunet. 20 participants also approved individual interviews.

Results

Important result from this study is that there is a small difference between the interventions regarding achieved work participation from the start to the end of the study. Some results are significantly different between the interventions. Participants with work focus had greater belief on their ability to meet work demands, had bigger weight loss, and higher VO₂ peak than participants without work focus.

The analysis of the qualitative data identified six themes representing the most important findings of what the participants experienced as promoting or hindering their process.

Discussion and conclusion

The knowledge contribution from this study is that the participants generally seemed to interpret their process as a process of life style change, rather than a process to improve their capacity to work. Work as an aim for the intervention should therefore be early integrated to maintain focus on improvement in capacity to work. The significant differences between the interventions, indicates that work intervention is important and should be a permanent focus in lifestyle interventions for persons with morbid obesity.

¹ Neovius, K., Johansson, K., Kark, M., & Neovius, M. (2009). Obesity status and sick leave: a systematic review. *Obes Rev*, 10(1), 17-27. doi:10.1111/j.1467-789X.2008.00521.x