

## ABSTRACT

# Randomized Controlled Trial of Adding Telephone Follow-Up to an Occupational Rehabilitation Program to Increase Work Participation

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*Introduction:* Transfer from on-site rehabilitation to the participant's daily environment is considered a weak link in the rehabilitation chain. The main objective of this study is to see if adding boosted telephone follow-up directly after completing an occupational rehabilitation program effects work participation.

*Methods* A randomized controlled study included participants with chronic pain, chronic fatigue or common mental disorders on long-term sick leave. After completing 3 1/2 weeks of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy based occupational rehabilitation, participants were randomized to boosted follow-up or a control group before returning to their daily home and work environment. The follow-up intervention was delivered over 6 months by on-site RTW

coordinators mainly via telephone. The content of follow-up was ACT based, emphasizing the importance of steady and stable return to work. Monthly follow-up phone calls were recommended, with the possibility of increased frequency if needed. Collaborative contact with stakeholders was encouraged. Primary outcome was RTW categorized as participation in competitive work  $\geq 1$  day per week on average over 8 weeks.

*Results* There were 213 participants of mean age 42 years old. Main diagnoses of sick leave certification were mental disorders (38%) and musculoskeletal disorders (30%). The total number of days worked during the first year was marginally higher in the intervention group (71 days) compared to controls (68 days). During the first 8-week period the control group had higher (re)entry to work. However, the group receiving telephone follow up surpassed the control group after 6 months and from that point on the intervention group saw a steadily higher number of participants working 1 day or more per week. One year after discharge the intervention group had 87% increased odds (OR 1.87, 95% confidence interval 1.06–3.31,  $p=0.031$ ), of having (re)entered competitive work  $\geq 1$  day per week compared with the controls, with similar positive results for sensitivity analysis of participation half time ( $\geq 2.5$  days per week). The cost of boosted follow-up was 390.5 EUR per participant.

*Discussion and conclusion* Participants receiving boosted RTW follow-up had higher (re)entry to competitive work  $\geq 1$  day per week at 1 year when compared to the control group. Adding low-cost boosted follow-up by telephone after completing an occupational rehabilitation program augmented the effect on return-to-work.