

Title

Readiness for return to work among cancer survivors - A quantitative exploratory study

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Introduction

Determination and evaluation of work readiness is crucial to secure a successful return to work (RTW). However, knowledge about work readiness following cancer is very limited. The aim was to explore the distribution and development of stages of readiness for RTW stages amongst cancer survivors and to examine if readiness for RTW stages at baseline were associated with actual RTW.

Methods

Cancer survivors who were on sick leave and attended a five-day residential interdisciplinary rehabilitation stay and 12 weeks later a two-day follow-up stay with focus on work retention after life-threatening disease, were eligible for this study. *The Readiness for Return to Work Scale* (R-RTWS) was used to allocate the cancer survivors into one out of five possible stages of readiness for RTW. R-RTWS was collected at baseline and at follow-up. Wilcoxon signed rank test was used to examine differences between R-RTWS at baseline and follow-up. The association between R-RTWS at baseline and RTW was examined using binary regression.

Results

In total 77 cancer survivors were included. The mean age was 49 (± 9) years, 67 were women; 80% had been diagnosed with cancer for less than a year. At baseline the participants were in stages 2-4 and at follow-up in stages 2-5. Significant improvement in readiness for RTW stage from baseline to follow-up was found on a group level ($p < 0.001$). However, 11% of the participants regressed and 34% of the participants in work readiness stage stayed unchanged. No association between the R-RTWS at baseline and RTW was found.

Discussion and conclusion

This exploratory study showed that reduced work readiness exists among cancer survivors, although their readiness for RTW stage improved significantly over a 12 week period. The R-RTWS may be a useful questionnaire to support health care providers to identify main problems in work readiness, monitor work readiness during treatment and to secure the correct timing of RTW. However, the construct of readiness for RTW following cancer needs additional investigation and further validation and development of the R-RTWS within cancer survivors is needed before the instrument can be applied in clinical practice.