

JOBREHAB – BENEFITS OF A SHORT-TERM STAY-AT-WORK PROGRAM AT VOLKSWAGEN COMMERCIAL VEHICLES IN GERMANY.

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Background:

It is known that in patients with low back pain rehabilitation in close cooperation with industrial medicine is more effective than rehabilitation alone (Wadell & Burton, 2000). In Germany, the lack of cooperation between rehabilitation measures and the industrial medical services has been criticised repeatedly (Müller-Fahrnow et al., 2005). Therefore, the project JobRehab was implemented to develop a job-orientated rehabilitation program for workers suffering from complaints of the musculo-skeletal system.

The agreed concept comprises the following elements:

- Improved communication between industrial health services and rehabilitation departments (the individual assessment of the workplace is directly sent to the rehab centre) and vice versa (the evaluation of the rehab doctor is focussed on the performance at the given workplace)
- Orientation of the interventions at the special needs of the given workplace and the functional deficits and potentials of the worker (work-place orientated evaluation and deficit-orientated functional training)
- Demand-orientated rehabilitation programs were developed and applied according to the individual needs of the patients (level 1: week-long out-patient rehabilitation program; level 2-o: three-weeks out-patients rehabilitation program; level 2-i: three-weeks in-patient rehabilitation program)
- participation of the workers at their own ones' free will (advertising the projects in the factories)
- Education of all players in the process (physicians, therapists, companies, insurers) (Manecke et al., 2008; Schwarze et al., 2008a und 2008b)

“JobRehab” implements legal requirements in Germany to establish workplace health promotion as soon as possible and is based upon results of international studies.

Aim

The goal of this evaluation was to assess the feasibility and benefits of the JobRehab concept for a weeklong out-patient vocational rehabilitation program at Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles. To examine interface management between stakeholders, health outcome for the workers/patients and health economic parameters (days of sick leave).

Material and methods:

The program has been developed in a working group including all relevant players in workers' rehabilitation programs as well as scientific institutions. These are an automotive company, rehabilitation departments, as well as the pension and health insurances responsible for the companies. The departments for Rehabilitation Research and Occupational Medicine of Hannover Medical University were involved too. The agreed concept has been implemented from January 2007 to January 2009. The implementation has been evaluated concerning communication between the industrial health centres of the company, the rehabilitation departments and the insurance companies. As well the health outcomes that the workers/patients received out of a vocational rehabilitation program. Baseline and Follow-up data of the patients were collected resulting in 67 cases of level 1: week-long out-patient rehabilitation. SF 12 (Short-Form health questionnaire) PDI (Pain

Disability Index) and FFbH-R (Questionnaire on back related functioning) were used. The efficacy of the program in terms of sick leave was evaluated by secondary data from the insurance.

Results

The patients reported significant benefits [improvements] in quality of life, in back related functional capacity and substantial reduction in pain related conditions at work at the end of the rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation physicians recommended a stay at the previous work for 92.7% of the participating workers (Level I: 98.4%, Level II: 81.8% and Level III: 95.0%). A stay/ return to work was deemed possible with limitations for 17.4 % of the study sample (2% in Level I, 7.6% in Levels II and III). The most common limitations, which applied to 43 workers, were the following: 1) 22 cases "limited lifting, carrying, pushing, pulling, steering and working above one's head," 2) 9 cases "limited walking and climbing stairs" and 3) 3 cases "training deficiency."

Discussion

The results show that the communication between rehabilitation centres and industrial health centres can be optimized. The exchange of information is useful for both rehabilitation physicians and the physicians of the industrial health services. The participants give very positive ratings. For patients with less severe complaints an intensive short-term intervention is effective to realize a stay at work.

References

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