

## **Effectiveness of interventions to improve participation in work.**

Joan Verhoef<sup>1,2</sup>, Harald Miedema<sup>1,2</sup>, Marij Roebroek<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rotterdam University, Rotterdam, Netherlands, <sup>2</sup>Erasmus MC, Rotterdam, Netherlands

### **Introduction**

Persons with chronic disorders experience problems in participation in work. They often meet difficulties in finding and keeping a job that matches their capacities. Professional support is provided by various organizations with different expertise. Rehabilitation services may lack expertise on (finding and keeping) work; organizations specialized in return-to-work often have limited knowledge of chronic disorders. Studies of interventions aimed at improving participation in work of persons with chronic physical disorders have not been systematically reviewed.

### **Objective**

To determine which (elements of) interventions, aimed at improving participation in work of persons with a chronic physical disorder, are effective.

### **Methods**

We performed a systematic review. Relevant controlled studies have been identified in Medline, Cinahl, Embase and Cochrane register of controlled clinical trials. Two reviewers critically appraised the methodological quality of the selected studies and classified data on type of study, participants, intervention, outcome measures and assessment, and results.

### **Results**

A total of 65 intervention studies were identified that are aimed at improving participation in work of adults with various (physical) chronic disorders. Of these, 34 studies were excluded because they did not fulfil inclusion criteria.

The remaining 31 studies describe interventions for several chronic disorders, addressing patients with chronic back pain (16 studies) or other chronic disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis, traumatic brain injury, chronic pain, and other musculoskeletal disorders (15 studies).

Interventions showed substantial differences in duration and frequency, content and professionals involved. Assessments, outcome measures used and follow-up period also varied widely between studies.

Most of the effective interventions involved multidisciplinary treatment, group sessions, and a behavioural component. A number of studies involved occupational therapy.

### **Conclusion**

Interventions to improve participation in work of persons with a chronic physical disorder vary widely in content, duration, intensity and results. Extensive assessment and job analysis are essential to match client capacities to job requirements.

The fact that participation in work is influenced by a range of factors complicates research and comparison of results.

### **Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy**

The results of this study can reinforce the role of occupational therapy in vocational rehabilitation.