

The Belgian pilot project for early rehabilitation of nursing personnel suffering from low back pain

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ABSTRACT

Background:

The project is the result of both a political and a scientific thinking in order to lessen the burden of chronic low back pain (LBP) among workers. Following a scientific review made by the Belgian Fund for Occupational Diseases (FOD), a pilot program has been designed to promote an early return to work and to prevent the transition of LBP to chronicity. This project is funded by the government since March 1st 2005 and targets nursing staff in the health care sector.

Project content and access criteria

The project involves two main components, a medical one and an ergonomics one. The worker being off work due to LBP for at least 4 weeks and maximum 3 months is invited by the occupational health physician to take part to a new multidisciplinary back rehabilitation program established within the Belgian health insurance system ; the program involves an ergonomic component. Throughout Belgium, 39 physical medicine departments have accepted to deliver this program under contract with the FOD. The project other component consists of a workplace intervention in the patient health care institution at the initiative of the occupational health physician. The employer gets a financial incentive from the FOD when he agrees to the intervention. Several medical and occupational variables are collected in a standardised manner at the entry in the project and when returning to work.

Results

First results 6 months after the project start show that the project is facing two main challenges: disseminating the information about this innovative approach to the whole target population in health care institutions, and promoting an effective change in professional practices among both caring physicians and occupational physicians.

Conclusions

Promoting an early return to work among LBP workers implies not only to provide the worker with a sound program to this effect but also to succeed in networking occupational physicians and general practitioners.