

## **Appendix A**

### ***Alternative calculations of the primary outcomes***

When the main question ‘What is your current employment status?’ had not been answered, some other closely related questions in the questionnaire, presented in table 4, were used. If these questions contradicted the main question this indicated that the patient might have misunderstood the main question or missed to check all applicable answers. In some of these cases the other questions were used to calculate the primary outcomes, as described below.

### **Employment status**

To decide if a patient was employed or unemployed, the questions A, B, and C were used instead of the main question or in addition to it. Alternatives A1, B1 and C1 were all seen as indicating unemployment, all other as indicating employment.

For the 878 patients where employment status was relevant to determine, the following procedures were applied; If the main question had not been answered, data from at least one of the questions A-C were used to calculate employment status. If they contradicted each other, A was given a higher priority than B and C, and B was given higher priority than C. This handling of internal attrition was used for 76 (8.7%) patients at baseline, 2 (0.2%) at 3-month and 3 (0.3%) at 12 month.

If A, and at least one of B or C contradicted the main question, the answer on A was used to decide employment status instead of the main question. This strategy was used in 7 (0.8%) patients at baseline, 3 (0.3%) at 3-month and 3 (0.3%) at 12 month.

### **Long-term sick-leave**

Questions C, D, E, F, G, and H in table 4 were used in addition to the main question to decide if a patient were on long term sick-leave. Alternatives C2, C8, D1, D2 with fewer than 20 days of absence reported, E1, F1, G1, G2, G3, and H1 all indicated that the patient had not been on continuous full-time or part-time sick-leave for at least the last month, while C7, C13, D2 with more than 20 days of absence reported, and H2 was seen as indicators of long-term sick-leave.

For the 703 patients included in the analyses of long-term sick-leave, the following procedures were applied. If the main question had not been answered, data from at least one of the questions C to H were used to determine if the patient were on long-term sick-leave or not as described above, where D was the most influential. This replacement of missing data was used for 59 (8.4%) patients at baseline, 2 (0.3%) at 3-month and 2 (0.3%) at 12 month.

When the complementary questions were in conflict with the main question, the complementary questions were allowed to determine long-term sick-leave if both D and some other question indicated an opposite answer than the main question. This occurred for 13 (1.8%) patients at baseline, 11 (1.6%) at 3-month and 11 (1.6%) at 12 month.

### ***Estimation of number of full-time sick-days per month***

Since the number of sick-days relied on self-report rather than registry data, we categorized it into four levels among an ordinal scale; None (0 days), Low (1-2 days/month), Some (3-7 days/month), and High ( $\geq 8$  days/month). To calculate this value, the C question (table 4) was used as the base question to estimate the total number of sick-days during the period each questionnaire covered (i.e. 12 months at baseline, 3-months at the first follow-up and 9 months at the second follow-up), and then the number of sick-days was divided by the corresponding number of months. Since the answers were given in ranges of days, the middle of that range was used as a best estimation of the exact number of days. For example, the answer ‘8-30 days’ was seen as representing 19 days. The objective was to estimate full-time

sick-days, so answers under the headline 'part-time sick-leave' were given half the number of days since the best guess for 'part-time' was 50%. As an example, answering '8-30 days' under part-time sick-leave gave an estimation of 9.5 days on full-time sick-leave. If a patient had checked an answer both under full-time and part-time sick-leave, the two estimated values were summed. However, an answer of 'Less than 8 days' were transformed to 0 days if this was indicated by the answers on questions F, G or H. Also, if the specification on number of days at question D was within the range indicated by question C and higher than the original estimate according to C, the number of days reported in question D was used instead. Finally, if the answer on C was missing, questions D, G, or H was instead used to estimate the number of sick-days.

**Table 4.** Complementary questions used to measure primary outcome and estimate number of days on sick-leave per month.

A. Are you currently having a job?

(You are considered to have a job if you are employed, self-employed, or work as a consultant, and also if you currently are on sick leave, on parental leave, or on leave of absence.)

Check one alternative:

- (1) No, I do not have a job and I am not studying
- (2) No, I am full time retired
- (3) No, I am studying
- (4) Yes, I have a job and are also studying
- (5) Yes, I have a job

B. Have you started a new employment the last X months?

- (1) No
- (2) Yes, I quit my previous job and started a new
- (3) Yes, I have still have my previous job and also started a new
- (4) Yes, I was previously unemployed but have now started a new job

C. How long time during the last X months have you been away from work?

- (1) Not applicable (I am unemployed/retired)

*Full-time sick-leave*

- (2) Less than 8 days
- (3) 8-30 days
- (4) 1-3 months
- (5) 4-6 months
- (6) 7-11 months
- (7) 12 months

*Part-time sick-leave*

- (8) Less than 8 days
- (9) 8-30 days
- (10) 1-3 months
- (11) 4-6 months
- (12) 7-11 months
- (13) 12 months

D. Have you had any sick-absence the last 4 weeks?

- (1) No
- (2) Yes. Number of working days absent: \_\_\_\_\_

E. Are you currently away from your work due to illness?

- (1) No
- (2) Yes

F. At how many occasions during the last x months have you been home from work due to illness?

- (1) None
- (2) 1-2 times
- (3) 3-5 times
- (4) more than 5 times
- (5) Not applicable/have not been ill

G. How many days during the last x months have you in total been away from work due to illness?

- (1) None
- (2) Less than a week
- (3) 1-2 weeks
- (4) 2 weeks – 1 month
- (5) more than 1 month

H. [only in the questionnaire at 3 months follow up] Have you during the last 3 months started or finished a period of sick-leave?

- (1) I have not been on sick-leave at all
- (2) I have been on sick-leave the whole time
- (3) I finished a period of sick-leave and then had no more sick-leave
- (4) I finished a period of sick-leave and then started another period of sick-leave
- (5) I was not on sick-leave at first, but then started a period of sick-leave.