## Work absence and return 2

### 123 EVALUATION OF A RETURN-TO-WORK INTERVENTION FOR HOSPITAL STAFF

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**Objectives** To assess the impact of a rehabilitation programme targeted at hospital employees absent sick for >4 weeks.

**Methods** In January 2009, a new multidisciplinary rehabilitation programme was instituted at Southampton University Hospitals (SUH) for staff who had been absent sick for >4 weeks. To evaluate its impact, sickness absence data were collected prospectively from management systems at SUH and at a nearby control group of hospitals (Salisbury) from January 2008 to December 2010. In addition, occupational health records at SUH were individually linked to sickness absence records to check the completeness with which the programme was taken up. Trends in absence rates were assessed by simple descriptive statistics. Comparisons focused on the four quarters of 2008 (before the programme was launched) and the four quarters beginning October 2009 (after it had been firmly established).

**Results** During 2009/2010, 313 (42%) of employees at SUH who were absent for >4 weeks were referred to the rehabilitation programme within 6 weeks of going off sick. At SUH, the proportion of 4 week absences that continued beyond 8 weeks fell from 53% in 2008 to 47% in 2009/10, while in Salisbury the corresponding proportion increased from 51% to 55%. This gave a difference in improvement in rate of return to work by 8 weeks of 9% (95% CI -1% to 18%).

**Conclusions** Despite incomplete referral of eligible employees, these data suggest that the rehabilitation programme produced benefit. Further analysis will explore whether the programme is likely to be cost-effective.

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