

**1609c CHRONIC DISEASE AND WORK: CHALLENGES FOR THE AGEING WORKFORCE**CRL Boot. *VU University Medical Centre, Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

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The working population is ageing and is pushed to prolong work participation until a higher age. As the prevalence of chronic disease increases with age, the proportion of individuals with a chronic disease in the workforce increases as well. More than half of workers aged 55 years and up is having at least one chronic disease. However, policies aimed to enhance work participation focus on the general population of older workers without distinguishing those with and without chronic health problems. The aim of this presentation is to present challenges and opportunities to support workers with a chronic disease to remain active in the workforce until a higher age.

A recent review shows the importance of workplace factors for work participation of workers with chronic disease. Physical or psychosocial job demands, work organisation and support, and workplace beliefs and attitudes have been shown to be associated with work functioning. Previous studies have shown that there are many similarities between workers with different chronic diseases related to the role of workplace factors on work participation. Many interventions have been developed and evaluated focused on specific chronic disease, or on work disability in general. Evidence from randomised trials and other research designs has shown general support for job modification, coordination of return to work, and organisational support from supervisors or higher management. Work adjustments, formal or informal can be helpful for workers with chronic disease to optimise their work environment and functioning at work and reduce sick leave.

Awareness on workers with chronic disease, in particular older workers with chronic disease is increasing. Recent findings show the importance of focussing on the group of (older) workers with chronic disease as they represent a large and vulnerable group within the working population. Given the increasing societal pressure to prolong work participation, it should not be forgotten that the group of older workers is not homogeneous, but consists of workers with chronic disease that may have special needs. A healthy work environment is a continuous concern. Job loss has major consequences of the patient, as well as for society, so prevention of job loss is important and should start at an early stage, by preventing and reducing sick leave. Scientists, practitioners, as well as policy makers should take this into account.

**1609d MENTAL HEALTH AND WORK DISABILITY PREVENTION**

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Common Mental Disorders (CMDs) have an extensive impact on the lives of those affected. Knowledge on how mental health problems and disorders affect workers has been accumulating over the last decade. Apart from absenteeism and

long-term work disability, mental health problems affect the work functioning and productivity while present at work (presenteeism). The various stages of work disability in workers with CMDs, still at work, absent from work, and in the process of returning to work, pose different challenges to professionals and researchers alike.

This presentation will highlight:

- i. emerging research methodologies in the field of work and mental health;
- ii. evidence on the consequences of mental health problems for workers and employers; and
- iii. evidence from evaluation studies of stay-at-work and return-to-work strategies for workers with mental health problems will be discussed.

**1609e STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES OF RETURN-TO-WORK SUCCESS**

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**Introduction** While a large number of measures have been used to assess return-to-work (RTW) outcomes for injured workers, none are comprehensive and few have been consistently utilised, or psychometrically tested. Researchers have long recognised that there is no standard or universal RTW outcome measure, and that this is a significant problem for program and intervention comparison. Furthermore, it is unclear whether conceptions of success are different for physical and mental health conditions. The purpose of this study is to develop and test a return-to-work success scale focused on at work success, rather than preparation to return.

**Methods** *Phase I* involves collaborative generation of potential scale items and sorting the items into similar dimensions or categories using a focus group method. *Phase II* involves preliminary data collection and Q-sort analysis. *Phase III* involves initial psychometric evaluation of reliability and validity for the initial scale in workers with mental health conditions and physical work injuries.

**Results** The results of *Phase I* will be reported. Stakeholders including workers with physical and mental health conditions, employers, insurers and occupational health practitioners participate in focus groups to generate 'return-to-work' success items. Participants are asked to identify one thing that indicates that a worker with a physical health condition has successfully returned to work, and one thing that indicates a worker with a mental health condition has successfully returned to work. The items generated are collaboratively sorted and categorised through a consensus building process.

**Conclusion** Scale development will support improvement in RTW practice by producing a reliable set of measures that can be used to assess interventions or stakeholder programs and processes. From a theoretical perspective, the RTWSS will improve research by providing a psychometrically sound tool to more thoroughly measure RTW outcomes. It will also facilitate knowledge synthesis in systematic reviews and meta-analysis because the outcomes are directly comparable.