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What is a return to work after stroke? 12 month work outcomes in a feasibility trial

EJ Sinclair, KA Radford, MI Grant, University of Nottingham, J Terry, Nottingham CityCare Partnership

Background:

Return to work (RTW) is an outcome in determining the effectiveness of rehabilitation post-stroke. However, stroke survivors (SS) may return to different roles with altered work status. Income, hours, responsibilities and job-satisfaction may be reduced. SS may be dissatisfied if unable to resume a priori work status; alternatively adjusted work status may be viewed positively if perceived as a way of reducing the risk of another stroke. The purpose of this study was to explore what is meant by RTW.

Method:

Information about the nature of RTW (job type, hours, roles, responsibilities) was extracted from 3, 6 and 12 month follow-up postal questionnaires in 46 SS participants in a feasibility randomised controlled trial investigating effectiveness of a vocational rehabilitation intervention.

Results/Findings:

Participants took a mean 90 (SD:70, range 7-227) days to RTW. 19/46 reported working at 12 months. In 17 who supplied complete data, 7(41%) reported reduced working hours. Participants incurred a mean wage loss of 44% against pre-stroke earnings. 10/17(59%) participants were in the same job with the same employer and 6(35%) were working in different/modified jobs (1 missing:). 10/17(59%) had work-place adjustments. 18/46 (39%) participants were happy with their work situation.

Discussion:

Participants experienced marked changes in work status post-stroke, with implications for job-satisfaction, financial security and quality of life. Research into psychological adjustment following altered vocational status in SS is warranted.

Conclusion:

RTW is a complex outcome and may not translate to a return to pre-stroke vocational status. It is important to consider what constitutes a RTW following stroke.