Author's response to reviews

Title: Economic Impacts of Illness in Older Workers: Quantifying the impact of illness on income, tax revenue and government spending

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Author's response to reviews: see over
15 March 2011

Dr Melissa Norton,
Editor-in-chief,
*BMC Musculoskeletal Disorders*

Re: Economic Impacts of Illness in Older Workers: Quantifying the impact of illness on income, tax revenue and government spending

Dear Dr Norton,

Thank you for your correspondence dated 05/03/2011, which provided reviewers comments for our manuscript (Manuscript # 4052160874446169). Please see below for details of how we addressed each comment. The changes in the manuscript are highlighted in yellow.

Best regards,

[Signature]

Deborah Schofield
Reviewer 1
Reviewer: Silvia MAA Evers

This study highlights a relevant problem, the indirect economic impacts of illness related early retirement on individuals and government in Australia in 2009.

Major Compulsory Revisions
1) Improvement, the aim/research question could be stated more clearly, the term “indirect costs of illness”, as indirect costs relates often to productivity losses and costs of illness to health care costs and productivity losses. The aim of the study could be written down more clearly, eventually in a research question.

   This has been revised in the introduction – see page 3 - 4.

2) The model could be written down more transparent, an input table would be helpful to see were data are retrieved relating to Disability, Ageing, Carers, Income group, government payments, disability, chronic conditions, retirement, demographic variables.

   A table has been added – ‘Table 1’, and referred to on page 4.

3) Also the model features could be described in somewhat more detail.

   These details have now been added – see page 6.

4) This paper discusses intensively the relationship with the finding of other authors, but should clearly also discuss the limitations of the study/model.

   A limitations section has been added, see page 8.
Reviewer 2
Reviewer: Lieven Annemans

Please note that this is an excellent paper and I have only 3 comments:

- the perspective of the analysis should be more clearly stated. In fact there is a government perspective (less tax income, more allowances) and a societal perspective (productivity loss, by the authors called income loss).

  That this paper covers a government perspective and an individual perspective has been added to the introduction – see pages 3-4.

- regarding the income loss, I think this must indeed be considered as a productivity loss, whereby income is a proxy for the societal loss
- related to the latter, the authors do not refer to the friction cost method, whereby it is assumed the work loss due to illness is compensated by the fact that unemployed people will find a job. (see publications by Koopmanschap)

  It has been explained that this paper focuses on the government perspective and the individual perspective – see introduction pages 3-4 and discussion on page 9. The friction cost method has now been cited in the discussion and a paragraph explaining how the focus of this papers differs from this societal perspective has been added to page 10-11.
Comments from Associate Editor:

"To be able to place this paper in a public health journal, the authors should link the topic better to public health. My recommendation is that the authors discuss the labour market's accessibility for older disabled people / older people with health problems and/or social economic differences related to health (what does it mean to be ill and have a lower income in relation to participation in society, mental health etc.). What do the outcomes mean for the older workers? The focus is now too much on the governmental tax incomes and spendings on support”.

An additional paragraph has been added to the discussion to highlight how the results will affect older, ill retirees. It has also been added what measures government have put in place to make labour markets more accessible to older workers and those with a health condition. See page 9.