Reviewer’s report

Title: Effects of potential determinants for return to work among sickness certified patients in general practice

Version: 1 Date: 9 August 2012

Reviewer: Harald Reiso

Reviewer’s report:

Thank You for this well prepared manuscript.

My comments:

Major compulsory revisions
Words like effects of, affected by, influential, influence, explain, facilitate, must be used carefully when put in a setting of factors that may be associated with future events.

Do aims and conclusions “fit” – in abstract and in main paper?

In analyses: Rearrange groups of diagnoses when observations are less than 7? (Table 1 and 2)

Minor compulsory revisions
Use sickness certified patients, or patients certified sick? I prefer the latter.

Discuss how former sick-leave may be an indicator of a chronic health problem, or deteriorating health.

Details in the manuscript:

Title:
Effects of potential determinants for return to work among sickness certified patients in general practice
Better:? Determinants for return to work among sickness certified patients in general practice

Abstract:
The aim of this study was to analyse possible determinants (of what?) and their relative impacts on return to work.

Half of the study population returned to work within 14 days after baseline, and after three years (only) 15 subjects were still on sick leave.

Return to work was positively or negatively affected by (affected by?) a number of variables easily accessible in the GP’s office. Track record data in the form of previous sick leave was the most influential (influential?) variable.
Background:
Long-term sickness absence is one of the main risk factors (for ending up with a) disability pension.

There is no generally established definition of the condition (of what condition?), but in Swedish official….

Unclear: Long-term sickness absence may also be expressed in terms of return to work.

Reformulate:
The purpose of this study was to arrive at a simple model based on previously identified long-term sickness absence determinants by which return to work might be estimated (predicted?) early in the sick leave process in a cohort of sickness-certified patients followed for three years.

(Better use the abstract’s: The aim of this study was to analyse possible determinants (of what?) and their relative impacts on return to work.)?

Page 4.
… capacity, and a number of other items (what items)

Leave out?: … health care centres(, at the time of the study the vast majority,) or at subcontracted private…

Page 5:
Language: During the recruitment period copies of all sickness certificates, unclear: whether new or continuation, (better?: new or prolongation certificates) issued at the primary health care centre, were obtained.

Page 6:
Hard to grasp the essence here:
…or if the initial sick spell was followed by a sick leave free interval of more than 7 days, and that interval was longer than the next sick spell. If so, return to work was presumed to occur on the first non-sick leave day. If the initial sick spell or the sick leave free interval did not satisfy the return to work criteria, these were tested on the next sick spell and its sick leave free interval, etcetera, until return to work was obtained or end of follow up was reached.

Page 8:
Slightly more than half the subjects were women, mean and median age (were) was? 39 years,…

Use in abstract?: At end of follow-up 6 (1.3%) men and 9 (1.9%) women were still on sick leave.

Better to use association?: Annual salary had no significant (influence) association.
Page 9:
In multivariate analyses previous sick leave, age,…

Page 10:
Discuss more why age did not seem to have a significant effect concerning return to work. ?? (Age is significant in Table 2, and is “graphed” in Figure 1 A))

Explain/unclear: The 10% unexplained return to work proportion indicates that no major determinant was overlooked.

Page 11:
Explain novel here: In this study a number of other diagnoses proved to be significant determinants, some facilitating, others delaying return to work, a novel finding.

Page 12.
Explain how: The implications of the result of the present study might be that the existing difficulties in assessing the possibilities for return to work are relatively easily overcome.

Conclusions (in accordance with aims and abstract??):
Reformulate?: A number of variables (facilitated or delayed) were associated with return to work. Together they explained 88-90% of the return to work variation during follow-up. However, the two most important determinants together explained approximately 85% of the return to work. It might therefore be possible to (relatively simply) assess the possibilities of return to work based on data available at the time of sick certification, thereby avoiding unexpected long-term sickness absence.

Legends for figure 1.
Explain groups of age. 60 =? (56-65? 56-95?)
Explain groups of days. 180 =? (91 – 180+??)
Figure 1 C and D, just use:
Psychiatric diagnoses / No psychiatric diagnoses
Respiratory diagnoses / No respiratory diagnoses
Delete Figure 1 E?

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the
statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.