Reviewer's report

Title: Identifying factors relevant in the assessment of return-to-work efforts in employees on long-term sickness absence due to chronic low back pain: a focus group study

Version: 3 Date: 16 December 2011

Reviewer: Nathalie Donders

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript has been improved significantly due to the remarks of the other reviewer. The introduction is a bit lengthy, but much better to comprehend than the previous version. However, reading the manuscript again I found some other points that need attention.

Minor essential revisions

1. P 9: the function of the male employee in the second case is not mentioned; therefore it is a bit harder to understand why return to work is not achieved. Moreover, it was mentioned that a professional approach was advised but that interventions did not take place. To me it is not clear what is meant by ‘professional approach’ and what kinds of interventions were proposed.

2. P 10: during the first focus group information was gathered about arguments used for deciding about the sufficiency of the RTW efforts, and) the decision outcome (sufficiency of RTW efforts). However, I can not find any results about that second part: the decision outcome.

3. P. 10: the process of data collection is not completely clear to me: Figure 1 state that grounds were collected during the first focus group. This agrees with the information on p. 11. However on p 10 (last two lines of second paragraph) I understand that the grounds were investigated during the second focus group.

4. P.11 The researchers analyzed the grounds produced in the FIRST focus group and collected factors from these grounds. If I understand it correctly, the
grounds produced from the SECOND focus group meeting were used to collect factors. Or, do the authors mean the grounds produced on the first CASE? In that case, further on the text might be changed as follows: “the grounds from the second case were analyzed to confirm factors found in the first case. The distinction between order of focus groups and cases is clearer in this way in my opinion.

5. The second paragraph on p. 5 could be changed according to the previous point: “the members each assessed the FIRST case. The authors summarized 42 arguments” (second line) and “the members of the OTHER focus group… “

6. Discussion, 3th line: “Twelve of these 19 factors can be fitted within a single domain of the ICF model.” This may be understood as: all factors could be fitted to e.g. the personal domain and no other domains. Maybe change this into “within one of the domains of the ICF model”.

7. 4th line of p 20 regarding the literature on RTW: does this involve only RTW on CLBP only, or RTW on all kinds of disorders? Based on the reference I think it involves only CLBP, but this should be made clearer in my opinion.

8. A similar remark concerns p 22, first paragraph: are the grounds applicable to all imagable cases with CLBP, or really all imagable cases.

9. p 22, second paragraph. Should ‘efforts’ be replaced with ‘factors’? The relevance of this paragraph is not clear to me. Age came out as a factor during the analyses, but here it it stated that no assessment is necessary. This is a bit confusing.

Discretionary Revisions

1. p 3, In the Netherlands, assessment of RTW-ES takes.. instead of ‘this assessment’

2. p. 10: second but last line of first paragraph: standard procedure or standardized procedure?

3. p. 16, final line: sentence is not completely correct. Maybe it should be “The attitude of the employer IS relevant …”

4. p.17 The heading ‘interventions’ has not the same fond as the headings job accommodation and measure.

5. p.19: 3th line in first paragraph: available jobs the workplace. Sentence seems incorrect?

6. p 21, end of first paragraph: two sentences in a row start with ‘For example’

7. p 22, last three lines: Why was it relevant to include LE’s from 2 SII’s? Are there differences between SII’s, what kind of differences than?
Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests