Reviewer’s report

Title: The return to work experiences of middle-aged Australian workers diagnosed with colorectal cancer: a matched cohort study

Version: 2
Date: 7 July 2014

Reviewer: Sietske Tamminga

Reviewer’s report:

Review of: ‘The return to work experiences of a matched cohort of middle-aged Australian workers diagnosed with colorectal cancer’ – Gordon LG et al.

In my opinion this is a worthwhile exercise.

Minor Essential Revisions

Results
• Line 296; the authors state: ‘our findings generally agreed with the results of these studies’. I would like to suggest being specific; which results were the same and which weren’t.

Discussion
• Line 298; Please provide the exact return-to-work rates instead of referring to lower and higher.

Table 1
• Do the numbers not always add up due to missing values? Please mention.
• The reference to footnote 1 is missing, please add.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Background
• The authors provide as explanation to account for their choice of including middle age workers only ‘this age group are often in the prime of their careers and not yet ready for retirement’. What was their reason for excluding young people? Would work outcomes differ between young and middle aged workers? I would like to suggest providing a more extensive justification, supported by references.

Results
• Line 233; What was the reason for these participants to stop working? Could it have been their own decision?

Discussion
• Line 287; I would like to suggest adding a foundation for this conclusion based on the results.
• Line 328; the authors state: ‘many participants completed their interviews during
work time or while receiving intravenous chemotherapy in their outpatient clinic appointments. Therefore, it is possible that we may have over-estimated the proportion of men stopping work'. Could you please provide an explanation for this interpretation because I do not comprehend the argumentation.

• In my opinion, the authors should address implications for research and practice more in detail. For instance, the authors state: ‘the implication of these events suggest that employers will need to be prepared for more flexible arrangements as employees require time off work’. I would like to suggest elaborating on this statement by adding for instance suggestions for interventions to enhance these flexible arrangements or information about the employers perspective. Another example; the authors state: ‘rehabilitation programs to assist patients return to work as part of broader policies to increase work participation after acute illness or injury should be more attractive than increasing welfare payments or taxes’, which is in my opinion a rather broad statement. I would like to suggest making it more specific based on the results of the study.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**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