Author’s response to reviews

Title: Cost effectiveness of a multi-stage return to work program for workers on sick leave due to low back pain, design of a population based controlled trial.

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We have changed the original manuscript according to the excellent comments from both reviewers and filtered out some minor flaws. We have also registered at ISRCTN and added our trial number.

Comments of Kim K. Burton: We checked the manuscript for typos and English. costs due to back pain added in abstract, p. 14 added due to low back pain following costs of sick leave. Filled in some (preliminary) numbers in flow diagram Figure 1.

Comments of Niklas Krause: General comments: we restructured p. 11 and 12. Justifying our choices in definition of outcome measures based on literature. We agree that we summed up a great number of definition, some of these definitions will only be used in a possible methodological discussion of outcome measures.

Specific comments (discretionary revisions):
1). And 4.) Thank you!
2) added p.4 since other interventions are considered more appropriate in these cases.
3.) Clarifying our choice: added p. 4: A worker is also excluded if he had been sick-listed due to low back pain less than one month prior to the current episode of sick leave, leaving only new incident cases for our study.
5.) added p. 5 to avoid an unequal distribution in job characteristics after randomization.
6.) added p.6: These data can be used to adjust for co-interventions in the final multivariate analyses.
7.) A cost analysis from the perspective of the injured worker could have been an option, but the financial burden of disability might be smaller in the Netherlands because of differences in legislation. Because of the lengthy process of disability legislation the major financial consequences of disability probably occur after the 1 year follow-up period.
8.) Comments added in Figure 1.

Specific comments (compulsory revisions):
1). I hope we’ve clarified this point by rearranging the structure of this paragraph (p. 5).
2.) p. 5 added: is relevant from both the societal as the employers perspective. Since we only used new incident cases of workers on sick leave due to low back pain, over-sampling of workers with longer duration wasn't possible and wasn't considered appropriate because of the content of the interventions.
3.) Thank you!
4.) Added p. 11 We will choose for the occupational health services database since there is a known discrepancy with self reported sick leave [28,29].