

Abstract

Objectives

Cancer survivors have more sick days and increased risk of unemployment, fewer working hours, and early retirement. Considering the implications for the quality of life of cancer survivors and their families as well as the economic costs associated with sickness absence for the individual and the society, improving the work ability and the process of return to work (RTW) for cancer survivors is of major importance.

Self-efficacy (SE) refers to the individual's belief in his or her own ability to handle specific future challenges. Return-to-work-related self-efficacy (RTW-SE) has been shown to be a strong predictor of actual RTW in workers on sickness leave due to both psychological and physiological causes, but has not yet been investigated in employees on sickness leave due to cancer. The aim of the present study is to investigate the predictive value of RTW-SE in cancer survivors on sickness leave undergoing chemotherapy.

Methods

In a prospective study, cancer patients ($n = 400$) from two Danish hospital wards with various cancers at different disease stages will be included during a 12 months period. Inclusion criteria: age 18-62, employed but on sickness leave at baseline. At the time of chemotherapy initiation, the participants are asked to complete the 19-item RTW-SE questionnaire in addition to questions regarding demographic and illness-related factors. The main outcome measure is RTW (yes/no) at 3, 6, and 12 months follow-up.

Results

The project was initiated in February 2016 and inclusion is expected to begin in May 2016. Higher levels of RTW-SE at baseline are expected to be associated with shorter time to RTW.

Conclusion

To improve the work ability and the process of RTW for cancer patients it is necessary to obtain a better understanding of the RTW process of cancer patients. Work related SE may play a key role in that process.