Perceived employer-related barriers and facilitators for work participation of employees diagnosed with cancer: a systematic review of employers’ and employees’ perspectives

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‘Building Bridges Between Science and Practice’
Return to work (RTW) of employees diagnosed with cancer

RTW interventions: patient-oriented, inconclusive results\(^1\)

Employer:

- Main stakeholder RTW process
- Express need for support themselves\(^2\)

\(^1\)De Boer et al. 2015

\(^2\)Tiedtke et al. 2017
Objective

Synthesize qualitative knowledge about work participation of employees diagnosed with cancer and role of employers:

1. Which employer-related barriers and facilitators are perceived by (a) employers and (b) employees diagnosed with cancer?

2. How can these barriers and facilitators be synthesized to understand their perceived consequences for work participation of employees diagnosed with cancer?
Methods

• Four databases: MEDLINE, EMBASE, PsycINFO, Business Source Premier
  • Jan 2005 – Dec 2016

• Qualitative studies:
  • Employers (line-manager, supervisor, HR manager)
  • Employees diagnosed with cancer

• Data extraction: behavior / attitude of employer as barrier or facilitator
Results

Employees with cancer: 47 studies included
Results

Employees with cancer: 47 studies included

Employers: 5 studies included
Results

Employees with cancer: 47 studies included

Employers: 5 studies included

Data extraction:
✓ 180 barriers
✓ 236 facilitators
Synthesis

To understand the perceived consequences for work participation of employees with cancer

→ Model for employer support

3 Adjusted from De Rijk et al. 2007
Synthesis

Employee: “My employer shows commitment and interest.”

Degrees of employer support:
- Practical support (+/-)
- Social / emotional support (+/-)
- Communication (+/-)

Sustainable work participation

Willingness to support

Ability

Factor level 2

Factor level 1

Outcome
Employee: “...you shouldn’t go back somewhere where it has clearly been said that they [the employer] don’t really want you there...”
Synthesis

Willingness to support

Degrees of employer support

Sustainable work participation

Ability to support:
- Knowledge about cancer (+/-)

Employer: “Without having to reveal your medical secrets. But that you actually explain, what is cancer, what does chemo do to you. That information...that is crucial”
Synthesis

Underlying factors

- Goals
- Dependence
- Resources
- Perceptions
- Institutions

Willingness to support

- Ability to support
- Degrees of employer support

Factor level 1

Factor level 2

Factor level 3

Outcome

Sustainable work participation
Underlying factors

Willingness to support

Ability to support

Degrees of employer support

Outcome

Perceptions:
- Relationship with employee (+/-)
- Assess employee’s workability (+/-)

Institutions

Dependence

Resources

Factor level 3

Factor level 2

Factor level 1

Goals

Employee: “I heard tons of ‘You look wonderful.’ ‘You look fantastic.’ ‘I can’t understand why you’re tired.’”

Synthesis

Maastricht University

Amsterdam UMC

University Medical Centers

KU LEUVEN
Synthesis

Underlying factors

- Goals
- Dependence
- Resources
- Perceptions
- Willingness to support

Institutions:
- Informal rules: workculture (+/-)
- Formal rules: policy and law (+/-)

Factor level 1
- Degrees of employer support
  - Factor level 2
  - Factor level 3

Outcome

Employer: “With the procedures [within the company] we can go many ways. And, in my opinion, that also should be flexible, that you can adjust to the situation...”
Synthesis

Employer: “So that is the dilemma. On the one hand you understand but on the other hand, if you have been absent for one or two years and if you are not back on the former level, then there is a financial component. And I find that difficult…”
Synthesis

Underlying factors

Dependence:
- External help (+/-)

Goals

Perceptions

Willingness to support

Resources

Ability to support

Degrees of employer support

Factor level 3

Factor level 2

Factor level 1

Outcome

Employer: ‘I have few opportunities to discuss RTW with fellow employers and company doctors.’
Discussion

• Outcomes: perceived barriers and facilitators

• Influence of context individual studies
  • National / organisational policies
Conclusions

• Plurality and large variety of underlying factors
  → Complex for employer

• Contradicting results
  → No “1-size-fits-all”

• Need for interventions targeting employers
Results (differences employer vs. employee)

Employees with cancer:

Perception work ability:
✓ Overestimate work abilities because of invisible physical changes (-)
✓ Unrealistic expectations (-)

Work environment:
✓ Normal, stable, caring (+)
✓ Rigid, structured, competitive (-)

Discrimination:
✓ Ask to resign (-)
✓ Deny deserved promotion (-)

Employers:

Policy:
✓ Flexible protocol (+)
✓ Standard set of principles (-)

Balancing interests and roles:
✓ Balancing interests business, employee, colleagues, replacement (-)
✓ Wrestle with human vs. professional role (-)

Knowledge
✓ Lack of knowledge (-)