

Title: Return-To-Work (RTW) after lumbar surgery

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ABSTRACT

Background:

Return-to-work (RTW) after lumbar surgery due to a work-related injury poses a challenge internationally. Work hardening is used as an intervention for acute and chronic low back pain (CLBP), but it is not necessarily used in post-operative treatments.

Method:

The RTW rate of an experimental group (Group A) of unskilled labourers was compared with that of a control group (Group B) of also unskilled labourers. Group A received multidisciplinary intervention, including a work hardening programme with ergonomic adaptations, while Group B only received physiotherapy after surgery at a neighbouring town as a multidisciplinary team was not available. A RTW questionnaire was used as an outcome measure for both groups. During the multidisciplinary intervention, the improvement of pain and functionality of patients from Group A were also evaluated from pre-operative state to 24 weeks post-operatively with the Visual Analogue Scale (VAS) and Oswestry Disability Index (ODI) as additional outcome measures.

Results:

There is a positive tendency to successful RTW after work hardening for Group A, but no statistical significance between Groups A and B. The improvement of pain and functionality in Group A was highly significant from time of surgery to six months post-operatively.

Conclusion:

Work hardening was found to have a positive tendency towards ensuring RTW for patients after lumbar surgery for work-related injuries, and it had a highly significant effect on the improvement of pain and functionality.