

A 12 months follow-up of a company rehabilitation program for workers with low back injuries.

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### **Introduction and objective**

A Belgian steel company initiated in January 1993 a multidisciplinary rehabilitation program, the "live with one's back program", for its workers with a work-related low back injury (1). In order to determine its effectiveness, a prospective study was started in mid-1994 comparing outcome variables between the workers having attended the program and control workers

### **Material and methods**

Main inclusion criteria in the cohort were : workers with low back injury still off work at the 7th day post-injury and undergoing a baseline assessment within 28 days of the accident day. Follow-up involved every 6 months, an assessment by interview of residual pain, disability scores, medical services use, and psychosocial variables and every 12 months, a standardised clinical examination. The time evolutions for the outcome variables were compared using the Zerbe response-curves method.

### **Results**

Ninety one consecutive injured workers were included, and out of these, 80 could be followed : 43 cases (attenders) and 37 controls. Although the assignation to the program could not be randomised, both groups exhibited similar characteristics at baseline (age, pain level, disability score, previous pain episodes, clinical variables ...) except for the time before the initial assessment which was 2,7 days shorter among controls. Preliminary analysis of follow-up data show at 6 months, a greater rate of improvement ( $p < 0,05$ ) in pain level and in some functional disability scores among the attenders; at 12 months however, cases and controls were not different for pain-related variables but had different appraisals of their psychosocial environment. Cases had better relationships with their supervisors and experienced their workload as more often "heavy" or "too much work" than controls. After further analysis of the whole set of data, these results will be interpreted in view of the observations of other studies (2,3).

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<sup>1</sup> Mairiaux Ph, Demaret JP, Marenne B, Delavignette JP, Vivre avec son dos : the Cockerill-Sambre program for rehabilitation of low back pain workers. Premus 95 Montréal, 1995 : 429-31

<sup>2</sup> Lindström I, Ohlund C, Eek C, et al. The effect of graded activity on patients with subacute low back pain : a randomized prospective clinical study with an operant conditioning behavioural approach. Phys. Ther. 1992; 72 : 279-93

<sup>3</sup> Sinclair SJ, Hogg-Johnson S, Mondloch MV, et al. The effectiveness of an early active intervention program for workers with soft-tissue injuries. Spine 1997; 22 : 2919-31