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# Early multidisciplinary assessment was associated with longer periods of sick leave - a randomized controlled trial (RCT) in a Swedish primary health care centre

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## Background

In Sweden sick leave issues have had high priority within the medical and political debate in recent years. The authorities have invested large sums of money, two billion SEK/year (233 million EUR/year) 2009-2013 in accelerating and improving the rehabilitation of sick listed individuals. At the same time there has been a lack of RCT to study the effect on return to work (RTW) of interventions in primary health care. This RCT aimed to study the effect on RTW from an early multidisciplinary assessment in a primary health care centre.

## Methods

In this study patients who visited GPs at a primary health care centre in mid-Sweden and asked for a sickness certification due to psychiatric or musculoskeletal diagnoses were invited to participate in the study. Patients included should not have been on sick leave for more than four weeks. 33 patients were randomized to either an assessment within a week by a physiotherapist, a psychotherapist and an occupational therapist (18) or to “usual care” (15). The therapists used methods and tools they normally use in their clinical work. Main outcome measures were proportion of patients still sick listed three months after randomization, total and net days on sick leave and proportion that were on part time sick leave.

## Results

At follow-up three months after randomization, there was a trend toward a higher proportion of patients still sick listed in the intervention group (7/18) compared to the control group (3/15). The intervention group also had significantly longer sick listing periods with a mean of 58 days, (95% CI= 42-74), compared to the control group with a mean of 36 days (95% CI 18-54), ( $p=0.038$ ). The proportion of persons who were part time sick listed was significantly higher in the intervention group (10/18) than in the control group (2/15) ( $p=0.027$ ).

### **Conclusions**

In this RCT an early multidisciplinary assessment resulted in longer periods on sick leave and more persons on part time sick leave.

### **Key message**

- This study highlights the need for RCT in primary health care to study the effect of interventions on RTW.