Return to work after lumbar disc surgery is related to the length of preoperative sick leave

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Publication date:
2017

Citation for published version (APA):

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Download date: 29. Mar. 2020
Is return to work for LDH patients affected by duration of sick leave?

**Background**
Lumbar disc herniation (LDH) is associated with great morbidity and significant socioeconomic impact as the majority of the patients are in the working age.

**Purpose**
The purpose of this study is to investigate if the return to work rate after surgery for lumbar disc herniation is affected by the duration of sick leave.

**Method**
The present study was conducted as a single center study. All LDH patients who underwent surgery at Lillebaelt Hospital from May 18, 2009 through to November 28, 2014 were included. Data were prospectively collected in the database DaneSpine. Questions in DaneSpine include pre-operative duration of sick leave and working status one year post-operative.

**Results**
Totally 634 patients were included.

Overall 72 % of the patients were back to work one year post-operative. The rate of patients returning to work decreases significantly with the duration of preoperative sick leave.

Among the patients on sick leave prior to the surgery, 83 % returned to work if surgically treated within 3 months, whereas 50 % returned to work with sick leave extending 3 months.

**Conclusion**
The present analysis suggests that the return to work rate after surgery for lumbar disc herniation is affected by the duration of sick leave.

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**Table 1: Correlation between duration of pre-operative sick leave and working status 1 year post-operative**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of pre-operative sick leave</th>
<th>Not working</th>
<th>Working</th>
<th>ρ =</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1 month</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 - &lt; 3 months</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - &lt; 6 months</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - &lt; 9 months</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 - 12 months</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 1 year</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Correlation between duration of pre-operative sick leave and working status 1 year post-operative.