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## CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

# Promoting the professional reintegration of people with Rheumatic Musculoskeletal Diseases, based upon disability management principles.

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In Belgium, people with Rheumatic and Musculoskeletal Diseases (RMDs) represent a major group of patients on sick leave. In order to reduce costs for social security and in respect to the meaning of work for patients, the Belgian National Institute for Health and Disability Insurance (NIHDI) has reached out to ReumaNet to jointly start up the research project “ReumaWerk” to promote the professional reintegration of people with RMDs.

### Objectives:

1. Identify and assess the information about professional reintegration available to people with RMDs
2. Evaluate resources people with RMDs have to stay at or return to work
3. Assess the added value of a certified return to work coordinator (CRTW) and Patient Expert to support people with RMDs towards job retention and professional reintegration

**Method:** The research “ReumaWerk” was led by a Patient Expert who is also trained as a Certified Return To Work Coordinator. The research consisted of:

- Surveys to people with RMDs and other stakeholders
- Coaching people with RMDs to jointly define tailored answers on professional reintegration, following the DM-methodology.

The steering group of “ReumaWerk” included representatives of NIHDI.

**Results:** 127 patients and 79 other stakeholders responded to the survey. In total 238 patients received coaching and support.

1. There is a discrepancy between where people with RMDs expect to find information about professional reintegration and where information is given. Available information is not customized, sometimes inconsistent, mostly too general. Legislation is too complex
2. People with RMDs experience physical obstacles at work. Financial incentives are foreseen but are (a) not well known and (b) too limited
3. Focusing mainly on job retention and stimulating professional reintegration, taking into account each patient’s personal bio-psycho-social context, is definitely an added value: 80% of the respondents rated 7/10 and more as satisfaction rate. 82% of the respondents would recommend this support to other patients

=> information flows need to be improved and more specific

**Conclusions:**

1. Information flows about professional reintegration for people with RMDs need to be improved and be more specific
2. People with RMDs have specific needs to allow them to return to or stay at work such as flexible working hours, functional adaptations in their working environment and financial support
3. Patient Expertise and applying DM principles are indispensable: people with RMDs need personalized tailored information on professional reintegration opportunities as soon as possible

**Next steps:**

- Results were shared with patient organizations, umbrella organizations (Flemish Patient Platform (VPP) and Platform of French speaking patient organization (LUSS)), politicians and other stakeholders
- The Patient Expert continues coaching people with RMDs to jointly define tailored answers on professional reintegration, following the DM-methodology
- ReumaNet continues raising awareness on importance of professional reintegration for people with RMDs: campaigns with employers and employees

**Learning for international audience:**

- It is an added value to use Patient Expertise to offer tailor made support