



Ex-Post Evaluation - INTERREG III 2000-2006

PROGRAMME: INTERREG III A Vlaanderen Nederland

Neurological Reintegration

**Noord-Brabant (NL), Nederlands Limburg (NL, Antwerpen
(BE), Belgisch Limburg (BE), Vlaams-Brabant (BE)**

Project Good Practice Study

**Project study: Neurological reintegration
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1. General Information

Keywords: Reintegration labour market, multiple sclerosis, health

Region: Noord-Brabant (NL), Nederlands Limburg (NL), Antwerpen (BE), Belgisch Limburg (BE), Vlaams-Brabant (BE).

Programme strand: INTERREG III A

Duration: 1 July 2003 - 30 June 2006

Funding: Total budget €3,079,440 of which INTERREG contributed €1,500,000

Partners:

Lead partner: MS and Neurological Rehabilitation Centre Overpelt

Other partners: Academisch Ziekenhuis Maastricht (NL); Revalidatiecentrum Blixembosch (Eindhoven) (NL); Hoensbroeck Revalidatiecentrum (Hoensbroek) (NL); Revalidatiecentrum Leijpark (Tilburg) (NL); Academisch Ziekenhuis Middelheim (Antwerpen) (FL); Nationaal MS Centrum (Melsbroek) (FL); Ziekenhuis Oost-Limburg (Genk) (FL)

2. Project Aim

People with multiple sclerosis (MS) and victims of brain damage caused by severe traumas or strokes (temporarily) lose some their abilities and skills to work. The sooner a person gets back to work, the sooner he/she regains the lost abilities and skills, or the loss of skills can be limited to a minimum. The aim of the project "Neurological Reintegration Programme" was to allow Dutch and Flemish rehabilitation centres to work together in order to develop a method and programme for reintegrating these people back into the labour market as quickly as possible, increasing their job opportunities both during and after periods of neurological constraint.

3. Project Description

The societal pressure to reintegrate disabled and disadvantaged people into the labour market as fast as possible is increasing. In both Flanders and the Netherlands there have traditionally been few opportunities to re-enter the job market for people with multiple sclerosis (MS) and victims of severe traumas or strokes. Where support was forthcoming it was usually offered too late, placing individuals at a professional and personal disadvantage. The loss of skills during periods of illness or weak physical health made returning to the labour market generally more difficult. This situation was not helped by the lengthy rehabilitation process.

In light of this situation, four rehabilitation centres in Flanders and four in the Netherlands started the project "Neurological Reintegration Programme". In consultation with relevant research institutions the centres worked together to develop a tailor-made counselling process for their patients, where the employment (job search) dimension was integrated into the rehabilitation

process as early on as possible. This increased the possibilities for future reintegration and shortened the time span before patients returned to work.

Many factors affect the potential reintegration of MS sufferers and stroke victims into employment. Not only must medical treatment be taken into account, but employers need to be advised about reasonable accommodation and the working environment (ergonomics), communication with colleagues and applying for financial support for the employer. The project chose a holistic approach to support the patients in re-entering the labour market in the best way possible.

The treatment programme envisaged for patients with a neurological condition consisted of four phases. Firstly, the project assessed the possibilities and gauged the wishes of patients with regard to future employment and compared this with the demands of the job position they had before their health issues emerged. Secondly, in consultation with the employer, employee, the company medical officer, the care provider and other persons involved, the rehabilitation plan was attuned to the vacant job position. Thirdly, the tailor-made method of treatment was adjusted specifically to promote regaining the skills required to fulfil the job position. Fourthly, experts advised the employer in the fields of creating a suitable / reasonable workplace and assisted with communication with colleagues and applying for financial compensation schemes.

The project aimed to create a sustainable cross-border network for exchange of knowledge and practice and structuring future cooperation, and make available a practical set of psychological tests and methods to measure physical and mental pressure in every rehabilitation centre. The partners planned to develop a manual containing experiences obtained in the project that can help other centres in the Netherlands and Flanders to reintegrate people with MS or other brain damage, supporting as many as 350 patients with a neurological condition to re-enter the labour market, and then actually managing to re-integrate about 30% of them into the job market.

4. Political and Strategic Context

The project is based on a shared diagnosis and needs assessment carried out by the project partners. In both the Netherlands and Flanders it was felt that re-entering the labour market was a problem for patients with a neurological condition and that the resources and expertise were missing to resolve it. Though Flemish patients are helped in Flemish rehabilitation centres and Dutch patients in Dutch centres, sharing knowledge and expertise across the border improves the practice on both sides of the border. The shared language and close vicinity made it logical to cooperate in developing methods that could also be used in other regions in Flanders and the Netherlands.

5. Project Implementation

With a view to assuring efficient and effective project management, an external consultant who had already been involved in previous projects was brought on board at the start of this project to coordinate the project and handle the administrative and procedural issues, while the project partners concentrated on content and methodology. During the three years of the project the partners met regularly to exchange experience. Furthermore, the medical centres met employers to discuss methods and opportunities for taking up previous posts or taking up new roles.

6. Project Results

Sustainable networks were created between eight rehabilitation centres in the Netherlands and Belgium, as well as research centres active in the field. Each rehabilitation centre now has a practical set of psychological tests and methods to measure physical and mental pressure at its disposal. A manual containing experiences that were gathered during the project can be consulted by other centres in the Netherlands and Flanders for reintegrating people with MS or other neurological constraints.

As a result 390 patients with a neurological constraint were supported in their efforts to re-enter the labour market (157 in Flanders and 233 in the Netherlands). The target (checked and validated by academic experts) for the actual reintegration of patients was 30%. The final result was an impressive 61% for patients with a non-congenial constraint and 70% for people with MS.

The project certainly enhanced the awareness in both countries of the importance from a humanistic, medical and psychological, but also economic perspective, of reinserting people with a neurological constraint back into the job market as soon as possible. At an institutional level, the project enhanced cooperation between organisations and institutions on both sides of the border.

The need for knowledge transfer and exchange of experience in this field remains. As such, the project partners were committed to taking forward their activities. After the IIIA programming period, and without INTERREG IV funding, some partners are still working together in helping to rehabilitate temporarily disadvantaged people.

7. Conclusions

The neurological reintegration programme is a good example of a project having a major impact on the societal, organisational and individual level. A large group of patients have been reinserted in the labour market in a sustainable and endurable way, increasing the quality of their lives, generating profit for society and creating organisational learning across the border. In addition, the tangible products (manual, tests, and network) can help other centres in Flanders and the Netherlands.