ParkinWork: Parkinson’s disease and its effects on participation in working life.

BACKGROUND: Parkinson’s disease (PD) is a neurodegenerative disease with a lifetime risk of over 6%. The incidence of PD increases with age, but about one in two persons with PD get diagnosed whilst of working age. Not being able to continue participating in working life is often mentioned by persons with PD as one of the worst effects of the disease and it is one of the major contributors to the societal costs incurred by PD.

SCIENTIFIC QUESTIONS AND METHOD: With ParkinWork, we want to examine the effects of PD on the ability to participate in working life. The first study was an exploratory cross-sectional study employing data from the Swedish Parkinson registry examining which aspects of the disease that increase the likelihood of leaving the workforce. The second study was based on data on all sick-leave episodes in Sweden 2008-2014 and aimed to investigate whether persons with PD exhibited increased sickness absence prior to an incident PD sick-leave.

RESULTS: Experiencing anxiety was associated with not being available in the workforce. Due to the study design, it is not possible to distinguish whether there is any causality to the association and, if causality would be presumed, whether anxiety is a cause or an effect of workforce unavailability. Furthermore, persons later diagnosed with PD were found to be on sick-leave due to any or musculoskeletal diagnoses more often than controls at least five years prior to the incident PD sick-leave. No difference between the two groups were found for mental and behavioral disorders.

IMPLICATIONS: Anxiety is a modifiable factor against which there are effective treatments available. As such, it is imperative that anxiety is addressed in working age persons with PD. The prodromal PD process is currently thought to primarily be characterized by non-motor symptoms such as depression, anosmia and constipation. Our findings point to the significantly negative effects of non-specific early motor symptoms on workforce participation. As the work ability is likely to already be in decline at the time of diagnosis, it is important to start addressing workforce participation issues as soon as the PD diagnosis is established.

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