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BRADFORD SCORE: IS IT STILL RELEVANT?

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Background

Sickness absence (SA) is an important consideration for all stakeholders in work and health across the economy. While minor illnesses continue as a common cause of sickness absence in the UK labour market, an increasing number of workers are living with long term illness. The Bradford score is used by managers and HR to identify staff affected by ill health which can feed into organisational policies.

Aim

To investigate whether the Bradford Score is still a relevant tool to use for SA management.

Methods

Scoping review with a search of Medline, Embase, Cochrane Library and Google Scholar and grey literature for studies on the Bradford score - sickness absence management and other references describing the Bradford Score.

Results

Despite its extensive use, there is surprisingly little research conducted on its use and effectiveness in practice. The Score appears to have been developed from Bradford's law (of scatter) and may not be relevant to current occupational health contexts.

Conclusions

While the Bradford score can be used as a trigger point/ surrogate marker to consider formal action regarding improved attendance, there is no evidence to suggest this has value for employee or organisation. Short-term absences can be highly disruptive but use of the Bradford score as a trigger point can lead to automatic referral to OH leading to a review of little value. The trigger point approach to management action, although widespread, over-simplifies the complex nature of SA.

Reference:

Bradford SC. Sources of information on specific subjects. *Engineering* 1934; 137:85-6.