Health economic aspects of lifestyle interventions in individuals with overweight or obesity and chronic non-specific low back pain

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PUBLIC PHD DEFENCE FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR IN REHABILITATION SCIENCES AND PHYSIOTHERAPY

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ROOM D2.01, CAMPUS ETTERBEEK

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ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH

BACKGROUND:

Many people in Switzerland and Belgium have chronic back pain and overweight or obesity at the same time. These two problems feed into each other and cost a lot of money through healthcare and lost work days.
Usually, back pain and weight problems are treated separately, but this research asked: what if we treated them together?

AIMS:

This study tested whether adding lifestyle interventions to regular medical treatment works better and costs less than standard treatment alone. We also wanted to know: How much do chronic back pain and overweight or obesity actually cost per person in Switzerland? What kind of lifestyle interventions these individuals prefer in Switzerland?

MAIN RESULTS:

- Adding exercise and healthy eating programs to regular treatment appears to be good value for money—especially when you consider lost or impaired work time.
- Back pain and weight problems cost much more than direct medical costs (e.g., medications, visits to the general practitioner) —mostly because people miss work or struggle to work while in pain.
- 80 out of 100CHF paid by society are due to absence of work, working despite feeling unwell or impaired during leisure time.
- People want treatment programs that do not need a lot of weekly time investment (≤ 1 hour/week) and combine both exercise and diet advice. Intervention costs and expected pain reduction were the most relevant aspects.
- What works in research studies doesn't always work the same way in real life, so treatment needs to fit to patients' preferences.
- What is evaluated in clinical trials can often not be translated to clinical practice due to the strict inclusion criteria in clinical trials.

CONCLUSION:

Treating back pain and weight problems together is both better for people's health and better for the economy. The real cost comes mostly from lost work time, not hospital bills—which is why prevention and combined treatment make sense from a health economic point of view. When treatment is flexible, quick, and includes both exercise and dietary interventions, people may reduce their chronic back pain levels while costs go down overall.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Alexander Philipp Schurz (born 01/03/1996 in Augsburg/ Germany) is a physiotherapist (MSc, Bern University of Applied Sciences/ Switzerland) and public health researcher (MPH, University of Bern/ Switzerland) with a special interest in health economics (focus of the PhD), driven by the goal of making healthcare more effective, efficient, and sustainable.
Building on this work, I currently serve as a project manager for a national quality development programme for outpatient physiotherapy at the Institute of Health Economics in Winterthur of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland).