A comparison of reporting practices for work-related musculoskeletal disorders between occupational physicians, general practitioners from 2006-2016 and rheumatologists from 2005-2009 utilising the Health and Occupation Research Network (THOR) surveillance scheme

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Health and Occupation Reporting Network (THOR) is a network of physician-led voluntary surveillance schemes to monitor the incidence and determinants of occupational disease and work-related ill-health. Data on work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSDs) are collected; GPs (reporting to THOR-GP), occupational physicians (reporting to Occupational Physicians reporting Activity- OPRA) and rheumatologists (reporting to MOSS).

Aims: The current study aims primarily to compare the reporting practices between GPs, OPs and rheumatologists as regards tasks and associated movements. The null hypothesis for the study is that there is no significant difference between the reporting practices for work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSDs) between OPs, GPs from 2006 - 2013 and rheumatologists from 2005 – 2009.

Methods: A retrospective cross sectional analysis on the data available from the THOR GP and OPRA schemes was undertaken to compare the incidence of work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSDs) by specialist OPs and to relate it to general practitioner-reported WRMSDs from 2006 - 2013. A comparison of the rheumatology group (MOSS) reports was also undertaken from 2005- 2009.

Results: A comparison of the reporting practices for WRMSDs between the three schemes revealed that there were statistically significant differences by task, movement, industry and disorder.

The THOR GP scheme included a greater proportion of cases involving forceful upper limb/grip, materials handling, and postural movements. Findings from the OPRA scheme showed a greater proportion of cases involving tasks and movements required for heavy/ light lifting carrying; the current study showed that an almost equal proportion of cases involving keyboard work were found across the three schemes. Case reports from
rheumatologists showed a statistically significant number of cases involving fine hand
movement than the other two schemes.

**Conclusion:** The study findings do not support the null hypothesis. Reports from THOR
provide data on current practice, which are useful for monitoring trends and to guide
planning. These findings could serve as a guide to choosing priority areas to focus upon
when providing work related musculoskeletal disorder (WRMSD) prevention education to
workers.