An evaluation of the predictive capacity of a declared musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) at pre-employment on subsequent work capability in airport security staff

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to determine the predictive capacity of a declared musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) at pre-employment. Work outcomes measured included sickness absence rates (including total, psychiatric and MSD related absence), restriction, relocation, ill health retirement and leaving rates. Pre-employment questionnaires were analysed for 594 individuals who joined as security staff from 1993-2002. Declarers of an MSD were compared with non-declarers using data from the Human Resources department and the medical notes. Confounders included sex, smoking, male drinkers (>21 units/week), teetotallers, age >50 years, psychiatric history declaration and years in employment (>5 years). Also significant was the declaration of a lower limb condition with an increase in relocation, total absence and MSD related absence rates. The legal and ethical framework for pre-employment is considered. It is suggested that greater scrutiny is applied to declarations of a lower limb disorder at pre-employment. Further work is necessary to ascertain the types of lower limb conditions that are predictive of adverse work outcomes and debate the extent of consideration of confounders in the pre-employment fitness decision making process.