

As a THOR-GP reporter, you may have received a letter asking you to provide us with information on the age, gender and postcode of all the patients registered with your practice.

We have provided the following information to illustrate how important this information is to the project.

The THOR-GP project as a whole has been ethically approved by the North-West Multi Centre Research Ethics Committee, but we also sought additional approval for the collection of this extra information, which has been granted.

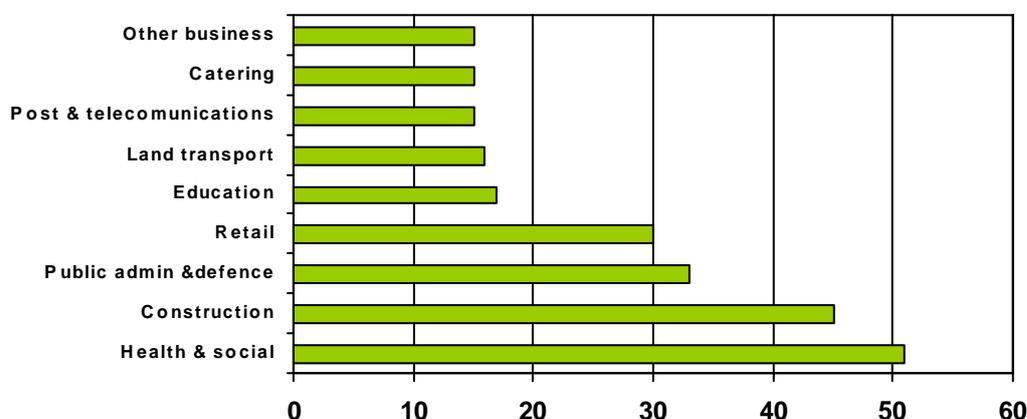
The instructions included with your letter ask for the postcode information to be sorted separately from the age and gender and saved as two separate files; this means all your patients will remain unidentifiable.

Calculation of UK incidence rates

One of the main aims of the THOR-GP project is to calculate estimates of the incidence of occupational ill health in the UK. This will help give a greater understanding of the burden of work-related ill health and also the employment sectors at risk.

Figure 1 shows the number of cases reported in the most frequently reported industries (June to December 2005). Here it shows that the healthcare sector is the most frequently reported industry.

Figure 1. Industries most frequently reported to THOR-GP Jun-Dec 2005



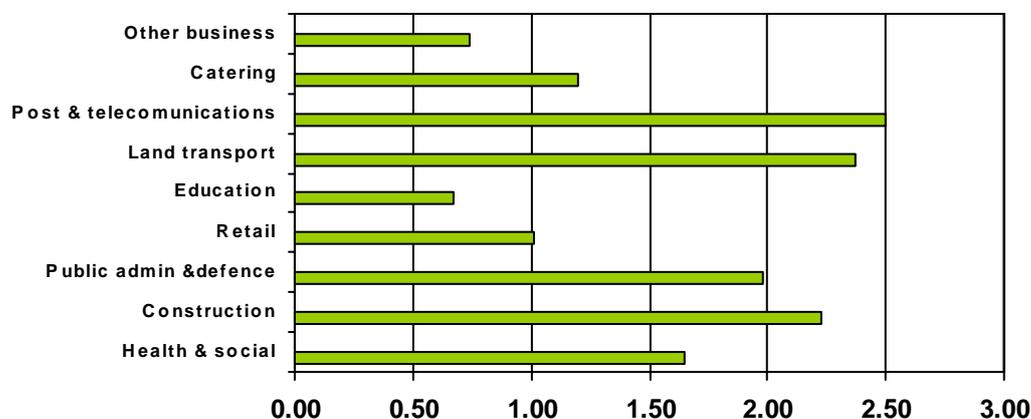
It is unsurprising that the healthcare sector has been the most reported industry as it is such a huge employer in the UK, but if these cases are taken as a comparative rate to other employment sectors it gives a better understanding of the industries where employees are more at risk. It is possible to give a crude estimation of incidence rates using the Labour Force Survey (LFS) as a denominator.

Example

If 5 window cleaners were reported to THOR-GP, and (according to the LFS) there are 24117 window cleaners in the UK this would mean $(5/24117) \times 10,000 = 2.1$ window cleaners per 10,000 employed had been reported with occupational ill health.

Figure 2 shows these cases as a rate per 100,000 employed persons in each sector and a higher incidence of occupational ill health is shown to have been reported in post & telecommunications, land transport and construction.

Figure 2. Incidence in industries most frequently reported to THOR-GP (Jun-Dec 2005) compared to Labour Force Survey per 100,000 persons per year



Using the LFS can help us give comparative rates between the industries reported to THOR-GP, but using LFS data to calculate incidence would only be accurate if all GPs in the UK were reporting to the scheme, i.e. covering the whole UK population. As we have just over 300 GPs participating in the scheme, there is not total UK coverage. Therefore, we need to have more information about our particular denominator i.e. the practice populations of all THOR-GP participants. If we have a breakdown of the age, gender, and postcode of all the patients in each practice then we can use Census 2001 data to characterise our denominator. This will enable us to establish what proportion of the UK population is covered by our scheme and how the THOR-GP population differs in employment.

Example

According to the LFS 2005, 11% of the UK working population are employed in the healthcare sector. If, for example, only 5% of the THOR-GP population were employed in this sector, the THOR-GP incidence would then be multiplied by 2.2 to give a UK estimate.

You will only be asked to provide this information once.

The information on work-related ill health that you see in your general practice clinics is of enormous value. Once we have collected information on the THOR-GP denominator this will enable us to calculate UK incidence rates and therefore contribute to public health and help to inform public policy on health at work.

Many thanks for you continued participation