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The nature of work-related neck and upper limb musculoskeletal disorders

Peter W Buckle ... J Jason Devereux

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Abstract

The nature of work-related musculoskeletal disorders of the neck and upper limbs is reviewed using both scientific data and the consensus view of experts, union bodies and government agencies across the European Union. Work-related musculoskeletal disorders describe a wide range of inflammatory and degenerative diseases and disorders. These conditions result in pain and functional impairment and may affect, besides others, the neck, shoulders, elbows, forearms, wrists and hands. They are work-related when the work activities and work conditions significantly contribute to their development or exacerbation but are not necessarily the sole determinant of causation. The classification and the need for standardised diagnostic methods for assessment of neck and upper limb musculoskeletal disorders are reviewed. These disorders are a significant problem within the European Union with respect to ill health, productivity and associated costs. The pathomechanisms of musculoskeletal disorders affecting tendons,

ligaments, nerves, muscle, circulation and pain perception are reviewed and conceptual models for the pathogenesis of musculoskeletal disorders affecting the neck and upper limbs are presented. The epidemiological evidence on the work-relatedness of these disorders is discussed. A relationship between the performance of work and the occurrence of neck and upper limb musculoskeletal disorders is evident. Intervention strategies in the workplace for the reduction of both exposure and effect should focus upon factors within the work organisation as well as actively involving the individual worker. The current knowledge is sufficient to enable informed decisions to be made on future research needs and prevention strategies at the societal, organisational and individual level.



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Keywords

Work related upper limb disorders; Pathogenic model; Biomechanical exposure; Psychosocial exposure; Regulation

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