

Work in brief



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PSYCHOSOCIAL PREDICTORS OF THE DURATION OF MEDICAL BENEFITS

Researchers have explored a broad range of factors in efforts to predict health-related absence from work—a condition costly to employers, workers, and society. In this issue, Lötters and colleagues¹ approach the problem from a biopsychosocial perspective, using a 1-year follow-up study to investigate the relationship of duration of sick leave to depressive symptoms, fear-avoidance and self-efficacy among 187 workers compensated for musculoskeletal disorders. The authors report that in regression analyses adjusting for other individual and occupational factors, depressive symptoms and poor health were the major predictors of time on leave. An accompanying editorial by de Croon² discusses the findings and some challenges of analysing data on complex, multicausal outcomes.



MOBILE PHONES AND ACOUSTIC NEUROMA

Public concern about the possibility that mobile telephone technology could have adverse effects on health intensified with reports of brain cancer in users of handheld mobile phones. Recent epidemiological studies of the association of brain tumours with mobile phone use have had mixed results, most being consistent with no effect, but some suggesting excess risks among long-term users or for tumours on the side of the head where the phone is usually held. Findings reported by Takebayashi *et al*³ may tilt the balance of evidence towards the negative. This case-control study in Japan found no excess risk associated with mobile phone use in general, with long-term use, or in relation to tumour location. The mobile systems used in Japan differ from those employed elsewhere, however, so research is still needed to complete the picture.



CHRONIC BRONCHITIS AND URBAN AIR POLLUTION

The short-term health effects of air pollution have been extensively researched, but the chronic effects of long-term exposure are difficult to study and consequently not well known. New findings reported by Sunyer *et al*⁴ are noteworthy because the investigators had access to data on the incidence, as well as prevalence, of respiratory symptoms among participants in a large international study. Prevalence and incidence of chronic phlegm and chronic cough were associated with exposure to traffic and the level of NO₂ at home among women, but not among men. The authors suggest that this unexpected difference might be due to better estimation of exposure for women, who tend to spend more time at home than men.



ELSEWHERE IN THE JOURNAL

Other papers this month include a case-control study of occupational risk factors for pancreatic cancer in Chinese women,⁵ a pair of papers concerning industrial noise exposure and cardiovascular mortality,^{6,7} an assessment of grip strength as a possible marker for neurotoxic effects,⁸ studies of children's respiratory symptoms⁹ and myocardial infarction¹⁰ in relation to air pollution, and a short report on the mortality of workers who assembled gas masks during the second world war.¹¹

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- 2 de Croon EM. Studies in occupational epidemiology and the risk of overadjustment. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:787.
- 3 Takebayashi T, Akiba S, Kikuchi Y, *et al*. Mobile phone use and acoustic neuroma risk in Japan. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:802–7.
- 4 Sunyer J, Jarvis D, Goetschi T, *et al*. Chronic bronchitis and urban air pollution in an international study. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:836–43.
- 5 Li W, Ray RM, Gao DL, *et al*. Occupational risk factors for pancreatic cancer among female textile workers in Shanghai, China. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:788–93.
- 6 McNamee R, Burgess G, Dippnall WM, *et al*. Predictive validity of a retrospective measure of noise exposure. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:808–12.
- 7 McNamee R, Burgess G, Dippnall WM, *et al*. Occupational noise exposure and ischaemic heart disease mortality. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:813–19.
- 8 Charles LE, Burchfiel CM, Fekedulegn D, *et al*. Occupational and other risk factors for hand-grip strength: the Honolulu-Asia Aging Study. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:820–7.
- 9 Pattenden S, Hoek G, Braun-Fahrlander C, *et al*. NO₂ and children's respiratory symptoms in the PATY study. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:828–35.
- 10 Lanki T, Pekkanen J, Aalto P, *et al*. Associations of traffic related air pollutants with hospitalisation for first acute myocardial infarction: the HEAPSS study. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:844–51.
- 11 McDonald JC, Harris JM, Berry G. Sixty years on: the price of assembling military gas masks in 1940. *Occup Environ Med* 2006;**63**:852–5.