

**Introduction** Physiotherapists (PT) are highly predisposed to work related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSD), due to their work nature involving manual effort, static holding and repetitive action. The severity of the WRMSD is reported to affect the quality of life causing sickness absenteeism to work, increased restrictions to work and disability. Hence, identifying the WRMSD at an early stage could help in reducing the morbidity among the PTs.

**Methods** A longitudinal survey was conducted among PTs through a semi-structured questionnaire administered by in-person or by E-mail. A total of 350 participants consented to participate in the study. The participants were working as full time PTs, with a minimum of 1 year of professional experience, age group 22 to 45 years, of either gender, who had pain or discomfort for more than one week, and did not undertake any other part time job. The PTs did not have any prior musculoskeletal disorders, surgeries, pregnancy within the previous 12 months or any systemic health problems. The questionnaire collected demographic data, exercise habits, physical risk factors associated with working condition, present health status, Nordic Musculoskeletal Questionnaire (NMQ) and the short-form Workstyle Questionnaire.

**Result** The prevalence of musculoskeletal pain among PTs was found to be 88% and the highest prevalence of musculoskeletal pain was in the low back (61.5%) followed by upper back (59.25%). The mean age of the participants was 27.6 years. The prevalence of WRMSD was higher among male PTs (63%) and among those working in the paediatric neurorehabilitation department. 74% of the participants reported an adverse work style risk.

**Discussion** The high prevalence of WRMSDs among PTs can be attributed to several risk factors like lifting or transferring of dependent or non-communicative patients, work setting, practice specialty, age, gender, number of working hours, years of work experience and sedentary life style.

669

#### SICK-LEAVE POLICIES IN BELGIAN COMPANIES: A RANDOM TELEPHONE SURVEY

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10.1136/oemed-2018-ICOHabstracts.519

**Introduction** Since 2001, Belgian absenteeism has increased steadily, especially long-term absenteeism. In 2016, the percentage of employees on sick leave for  $\leq 1$  month was 2.13%; the percentage of those on sick leave for  $> 1$  month was 5.13%. Consequently, absenteeism has become an important element in the human resources (HR) management strategies of many organisations. The aim of this study was to describe sick-leave policies of Belgian companies.

**Methods** A questionnaire was developed by a team of experts in the field of occupational and organisational health to assess sick-leave policies and HR management strategies. The questionnaire included four main topics (33 items): company characteristics (e.g., absenteeism rate), organisational features (e.g., hierarchical structure), sick-leave policy (e.g., presence of a procedure to stay in touch with absentees, possibility for adjusted work), and communication (e.g., communicating absenteeism rates to employees).

Companies were randomly selected by sector from a database of 49 852 companies affiliated with Mensura Occupational Health Services (Belgium). An external research agency phoned those responsible for HR in each company.

**Results** From January to March 2017, 2230 companies from nine sectors, were phoned. Most companies had 0–20 employees ( $n=1807$ ), 388 had 21–200 employees, and 35 had  $> 200$  employees. More than half (55%) didn't know their absenteeism rate. Only 34% had strictly defined procedures and agreements concerning absenteeism. In 22% of the companies, policies on prevention and protection at work were defined; these policies were linked to sick-leave policies in only 40% of these companies. In 62% of the companies, there was no possibility for adjusted work.

**Discussion** The results of this study provide a solid basis for performing targeted actions to raise awareness of the importance of a well-established sick-leave policy. To increase return-to-work chances for employees with long-term absenteeism, sick-leave policies should be integrated in companies' overall health, safety, and well-being policies.

672

#### PROMOTING VISITS PRIOR TO RETURN TO WORK: A CASE STUDY IN A BELGIAN COMPANY

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10.1136/oemed-2018-ICOHabstracts.520

**Introduction** Since 2008, Belgian workers on  $\geq 4$  weeks' sick leave have been allowed to voluntarily visit occupational physicians (OP) before returning to work. In 2015, OPs affiliated with Mensura occupational health services (OHS) performed only 0.73% ( $n=2,603$ ) of these visits. Especially in small companies, visits before returning to work were limited. Often, employers were unaware of the opportunity to visit OPs during sick leave. In a large Belgian company, an initiative to encourage visits before returning to work was introduced with the aim to increase the chances of earlier resumption of work.

**Methods** In 2015, a large pharmaceutical company employing  $> 1000$  workers implemented the following procedure:

The company informed workers on  $> 6$  months' sick leave of the opportunity to voluntarily visit OPs.

Workers expected to be on longer sick leave were informed about visits before returning to work and the possibility of (adjusted) work resumption.

**Results** In 2015, 9.71% ( $n=103$ ) of the consultations with the OP were visits before returning to work. The most frequent causes of long-term sick leave (documented in 73 of 103 cases) were:

- Orthopaedic diagnoses (excluding spine and back pain): 39.7% ( $n=29$ )
- Psychological causes: 19.2% ( $n=14$ )
- Spine and back pain: 12.3% ( $n=9$ )
- Serious/chronic diseases: 6.8% ( $n=5$ )
- Other: 21.9% ( $n=16$ )

In the 73 documented cases, 44 workers were eligible to resume work, while for 61% ( $n=27$ ), an early return, which was executed with or without adjustments, was recommended.