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INTRODUCTION

Musculoskeletal discomfort is a common health problem among the working population, including health-care workers.¹⁻⁶ A large-scale nationwide study in the United States showed that 17.6% of workers had had at least 1 episode of back pain lasting for a week or more during a 1-year period, and that over 50% of affected workers attributed their back pain to work activ-

Prevalence of Musculoskeletal Discomfort among Health-care Workers of a Medical Center

ABSTRACT

Nurses are known to be at high risk of back pain. Other health-care workers and other musculoskeletal conditions, however, have been less extensively studied. To assess the prevalence of miscellaneous musculoskeletal discomforts of different body parts among various health-care workers, we conducted a survey in a medical center in Taiwan. A total of 931 (79.2%) workers responded, and the prevalence of musculoskeletal discomfort was highest among nursing staff (89.8%). Soreness was the most common complaint (97.2%) and lower back was most frequently affected (55.3%). Among all conditions, numbness of the lower knees most often caused limitation of motion (66.7%). Our survey showed that musculoskeletal discomfort was prevalent among all health-care workers, but the distribution of body parts affected and the nature of the conditions greatly differed across occupations. Therefore, specific prevention strategies should be developed for each group of workers. (N. Taipei J. Med. 2000; 2:121-130)

ities.⁷ Among the workers, nurses and nursing aides had the highest risk.⁷ A high prevalence of back pain has also been observed among workers in many other countries,⁸⁻¹⁷ and nursing staff were generally found to have a high risk.⁸⁻¹² In a study of 3159 nurses in Taiwan, the 1-year prevalence of low back pain was found to be 69.7%.²¹ However, musculoskeletal problems of body parts other than the back have been far less frequently reported in the literature. Engels et al. found that the prevalence of musculoskeletal symptoms

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