

“Observations of the Day”

Participant response to the Institute for Work & Health (IWH) Study, “*Time trends in musculoskeletal disorders attributed to work exposures in Ontario using three independent data sources, 2004-2011.*”

The IWH study examines three sources of data to show that musculoskeletal injuries are declining in Ontario: emergency room visits, WSIB lost-time claims, and results from two questions on the Canadian Community Health Survey. According to the IWH, the decline over an 8-year period of these three independent sources of data is “consistent with an interpretation that the burden of non-traumatic MSDs arising from work exposures is declining among working age adults.”

Participants disagreed. A number of issues were raised:

It is a “paper” project—not a “people” project

- No consultation with any injured workers or advocates was used to make any sense of the paper evidence

Are RSIs declining?

A 2014 report from the **Institute for Work & Health** seems to say YES.

The report states, “*the burden of non-traumatic MSDs arising from work exposures is declining among working-age adults.*”

Says Ontario Public Service Employee’s Union’s Diana Clarke:

“If you don’t see the whites of the eyes of the injured worker across from you then you don’t have justice!”

Even if musculoskeletal injuries are declining, the research does not say why.

- The paper describes (as all research does) the limitations of the study—the decline could be caused by other factors, so we don’t really know the reason for the “decline.”

There are problems with emergency room data

- A huge push a few years ago to NOT visit emergency rooms due to wait times and a wave of walk-in clinics
- Not all work-related injuries will be recorded as work-related
- These injuries can creep up and people may not go to emergency room

There are problems with WSIB data

RSI Awareness Day 2015

- WSIB data does not tell the whole story. The study used lost-time claims. *NOT no-lost time, *NOT abandoned, *NOT refused claims
- New policies at the WSIB dissuade many workers from filing WSIB claims
- “Claims management” is a thriving business where employers and their consultants under-report injuries through the WSIB system to get huge rewards for low claim numbers

Industrial Accident Victims’ Group of Ontario’s Alberto Lalli:

“Pre-Marshall and Post-Marshall reminds me of the invasion of the body-snatchers!!”

There are problems with the two health questions

- Made-to-fit definitions and characterizations of injury to make data fit because the survey questions were not exactly on point

Where is the “test of significance on the size of the decline?”

- This is not a large decline. Is the decline statistically significant?
- A lot of people are still getting RSI injuries, so don’t get sidetracked by small declines

Other researchers wonder about causes of the decline

- Published just over a month later in the same journal was a commentary by Sergio Vargas-Prada who emphasizes other reasons why claim numbers might be declining. Mustard et al.’s review discusses these other possibilities near the end of their article. This article gives more prominence to those other explanations. Specifically, claims could be decreasing because people may not associate injuries with work, they may not visit emergency departments, or they might not claim due to fear of reprisal, loss of wages, etc. Overall, injuries may be underestimated.

Lead with “Leading Indicators” says Dr. Phil Bigelow, CRE-MSD

Dr. Phil Bigelow talked about the importance of using leading indicators (health and safety identification opportunities) to prevent the hazards that lead to musculoskeletal disorders.

Bigelow said that addressing the root cause of injury is paramount—Action can prevent exposure.

CRE-MSD has developed a tool for JHSCs to use to identify ergonomic hazards so they can prioritize action to prevent injuries before they occur. The survey asks about 26 load types and an online version will be out soon.

Indeed, we know that occupational health and safety has to start in the design and execution of the work, not in a bunch of numbers collected after injury!!!