

From clinical activities to didactics and research in Occupational Medicine

L. ALESSIO, MICHELA CRIPPA, S. PORRU, R. LUCCHINI, DONATELLA PLACIDI, O. VANONI, D. TORRI
 Institute of Occupational Medicine, University of Brescia, Italy

KEY WORDS

Etiological diagnosis; occupational diseases; health surveillance; fitness for work

SUMMARY

Background: *The daily practice of Occupational Physicians in the most industrialized countries suggests that the frequency of traditional occupational diseases is progressively lowering, their gravity is decreasing, and the etiological factors are changing. This trend should be quantitatively and qualitatively verified with ad hoc studies. The information is particularly relevant for Academic Institutions where medical students and residents in occupational medicine are trained.* **Objectives:** *To analyse the trends of clinical diagnoses and health surveillance activities conducted in the last 15 years by an Italian Institute of Occupational Health, and to gain information on the most relevant topics to be taught in academic program and to be addressed with future research.* **Methods:** *Data sources were represented by the computerised registration of a) diagnostic activities and b) health surveillance programs, conducted by the Institute of Occupational Medicine of the University of Brescia, a highly industrialized area in Northern Italy. The observation period was from 1990 to 2005. The health surveillance programs regarded workers pulled from an iron foundry, a veterinary institute, a health departments for the assistance of elderly subjects, a nursery schools and a municipal department for road maintenance.* **Results:** *Diagnostic activities were conducted on 9080 subjects, who had been referred for suspected occupational disease. The diagnosis of occupational disease was confirmed for 3759 cases. Multiple diseases were diagnosed in 1554 subjects, yielding the total number of 5721 occupational diseases. The most frequent diagnoses accounted for allergic skin disease (23.4%), followed by pneumoconiosis (20.4%), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (15.9%), noise hearing loss (7.1%), musculoskeletal disorders (6.9%), respiratory allergies (6.9%), cancer (5.9%), miscellaneous (6.4%). When limited to the last quinquennium, the analysis showed a definite increase of musculoskeletal disorders, cancer, and, although at a lesser extent, diseases due to psychosocial factors. The analysis of the health surveillance programs regarded 1207 workers, and showed that various non occupational diseases caused limitation to individual work fitness. The most frequent conditions were musculoskeletal disorders (65%) and skin diseases (14%).* **Conclusions:** *The results from these two investigations are important not only for the didactic program run by the Institute, but also because they indicate the most relevant topics to be addressed with future research, at least at a local level.*