Reviewer's report

Title: Upper limb neuropathy in computer operators? A clinical case study of 21 patients.

Version: Date: 5 May 2004

Reviewer: Bruce Lynn

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BM Central Review

A limited series of upper limb pain patients presented as a case study. Mostly qualitative data, but on an understudied topic. Data on muscle weakness and nerve tenderness, which are important indicators of neurological changes, are the most interesting.

Ms needs to be improved a lot.

Major Compulsory Revisions:

1. English is in places poor. Need to get this up to good standard. Examples, first sentence of background, “associated to” where it should be ‘with’; use of “tardive” a word not in current use in the English language.

2. Discussion is too long. Can easily be much shortened. E.g. First para is vague and really says little; Sentence in middle of para 3 and preceding phrase, “or to the internal topography of sensory neurons which may vary in between individuals. While neurons exposed superficially in a nerve trunk are more vulnerable to external affliction, deeply located neurons are better protected [24].” This is a weak point and best omitted. But much more needs to come out of the discussion as well.

Results on the other hand are rather brief.

3. Issue of dominant hand being affected is discussed, and is in the Figs, but is never dealt with in the text of the Results section. How many subjects had predominantly unilateral symptoms in the dominant hand?

4. Results concerning nerve tenderness are given for only 4 of the 14 locations tested. Were there no changes elsewhere? If so, this is interesting. Likewise if there were changes this is important.

5. Referring to “injury” is unwise. No direct evidence of injury is presented. Better to refer to “handicap” or “functional impairment”, e.g. Abstract, methods, “severely injured” would be more accurately “severely handicapped”.

Minor Essential Revisions

6. P4, sensory testing methods. Need to give location of actual sites tested.

7. Fifth ‘o’ of methods, re nerve testing, location given as “below the arcade of the common superficial flexor ?????

8. Sentence after ‘o’s on page 4:”Due to the inexistence of a normal material for the neurological tests all assessments were based on comparison with “normal”. “ Does not make sense.

9. Background, para 3, also reduced sympathetic reflexes, see Greening et al (2003) Pain 104 (1-2),
10. In discussion, need to consider whether reduced force on voluntary contraction is limited due to pain, or due to underlying neurological change affecting the motor supply to the muscle. Key is to tell us in the Results if the test contractions were painful.

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

**What next?:** Unable to decide on acceptance or rejection until the authors have responded to the major compulsory revisions

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

**Statistical review:** No

**Declaration of competing interests:**

None