Author's response to reviews

Title: Comparison of two measures of physical work load in hospital personnel: A cross-sectional study

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Self-reported exposure measurement is frequently employed in occupational health research. Though criticized for its subjectivity the use of questionnaires has practical and economic advantages in large scale non-experimental studies.

In this study we compare two self-reported measures of physical demands among hospital personnel: A single question on the daily number of patient handling tasks, and a generic instrument (Hollmann's physical load index) where the compressive forces on the lumbar spine is calculated from 15 items on work postures.

In contrary to our hypothesis, the results of this study show that a single question on the daily number of patient handling tasks is more specifically related to the occurrence of low back pain than a generic measure including several questions. The study shows a 5-fold increased prevalence of LBP among personnel performing more than 10 patient handling tasks per day. Thus, in hospital settings the number of patient handling tasks seems to be the most relevant exposure in relation to LBP.

This result has practical implications when designing questionnaires and pointing out high risk groups.