Reviewer’s report

Title: Musculoskeletal symptoms of the upper extremities and the neck: Assessment of prevalence and analysis of symptom-predicting factors at visual display terminals workplaces in a cross-sectional study

Version: 1 Date: 17 December 2007

Reviewer: Jens Wahlström

Reviewer’s report:

General comments

This paper reports the prevalence of musculoskeletal symptoms in the neck and upper extremities from employees using visual display terminals (VDTs) at a chemical company (n=1065). The authors also present associations between musculoskeletal symptoms and workplace factors, psychosocial as well as physical, and adjusts for individual factors. In a small sample (n=82) of the study population a physician have also performed physical examinations of the neck and upper extremities.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1. Background.

a. Why are the literature databases only searched from 1990-2005? It is now the end of 2007. I would like to see a literature search up to date.

b. I miss several important studies in Table 1. Only one report from the NUDATA-study, no work from Dr Gerr’s group in the US. I would like an updated review of the literature and studies included in table 1, otherwise such a table makes no sense.

2. Goal of this study. First, I think the aim of the study was to determine the prevalence of symptoms not disorders. I do not understand the second sentence and suggest that it is omitted. I suggest that this paragraph is condensed into one or two sentences which clearly describes the aim(s) with the study.

3. Materials and methods. This section needs clarification. I suggest the authors use more subheadings and describe in detail what questions were included. For example, on page 6 under identification of symptom-predicting factors, line 8, the factor typing is said to have significant effects on neck symptoms. However, the reader does not know what typing is here. Was it assessed in the check-list or in the questionnaire? How was it operationalized? Used as a continuous or ordinal variable in the model?

4. Instruments. I would like a description of the check-list here, not only that relevant ergonomic information was gathered, and a reference. Please, provide the reader with a short but informative description of the check-list.
5. Results, symptom prevalence. I think it would be more straightforward to present the prevalence of the symptoms instead of the mean prevalence. Mean of what?

6. Discussion. In general the discussion only relates to the authors own findings. Beside the first paragraph there are only two references in the discussion. For example, have other studies observed the same risk factors for neck symptoms? How does the checklist you have used work in comparison with other checklists? Work-style has been used in the literature, is that something that you could have used?

7. Discussion. In general, references to tables and figures should not be given in the discussion.

8. Discussion, significance of the results. 1st sentence, What is the main findings from table 1?

9. Discussion, significance of the results. 3rd sentence, that conclusive statement can not be drawn from the present cross-sectional study.

10. Conclusions. I do not agree with the authors conclusions. I suggest the authors to limit their conclusions to facts that are supported by their data presented in the paper.


Minor Essential Revisions

Discretionary Revisions

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

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests