Reviewer's report

Title: Relationship between working with Video Display Terminals (VDT) and frequency of dermatologic manifestations in office workers: a cross-sectional study

Version: 3  Date: 25 May 2004

Reviewer: Berndt Stenberg

Reviewer's report:

General
This is a very short study that does not add any new knowledge. However, it has some interest as it indicates that skin problems of that kind that was reported from foremost Scandinavian countries are seen in this region of the world. It has, for example, interest because it studies a population that can be considered to be genetically different from the northern European population.

Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)
The literature review in the introduction should be somewhat extended. The most consistent finding in Scandinavian studies is a dose-response relationship between TIME in computer work and PREVALENCE of skin symptoms. Studies on the cause of these skin symptoms are contradictory when it comes to alternating EMF and electrostatic fields. In paragraph 3 the authors state that the emissions of factors such as EMF from VDTs can not play a role in causing skin problems. In the following paragraph EMFs "can play a role" which is contradictory. There are some good reviews (for example by Bergquist U) that summarize the present state of the art.
How was the data on skin symptoms/signs gathered and what criteria were used for the diagnoses? How was data on time at VDT gathered? From the subjects or independently? Were the subjects aware of the scope of the study? Could there be a recall bias in the analysis of the relationship between time at VDT and symptoms (not the signs)?

How was potential confounding from age and gender controlled for in the analysis? I understand that the authors state that they have taken those factors into consideration.

Why should VDT workers with skin symptoms/signs be followed up regularly? What do the authors know about the prognosis of these health problems? There are some recent studies published which should be referred to.

Reference list must be corrected according to normal standards. Many names are misunderstood. Nils, Mats, Niels for example, are first names.

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct) Tables 1-2 and Figures 1-2 give the same information. Choose either or. Table 3, column 4 must be edited correctly.

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 of limited interest

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

Statistical review: No

Declaration of competing interests:

None