Reviewer's report

Title: Characteristics of national registries for occupational diseases: international development and validation of an audit tool (ODIT)

Version: 1 Date: 10 January 2009

Reviewer: Daniela Pelcova

Reviewer's report:

Manuscript of Spreeuwers et al. presents a newly developed tool for quality assessment and quality improvement of national registries of occupational diseases. Authors invited occupational medicine experts from 25 EU Member states (the year of invitation should be given, as there are total 27 Member states at present) in a Delphi study to answer two rounds questionnaires of the procedure. The questions posed by the authors are well defined and the methods are appropriate and well described.

The authors mention Type of exposure according to the EU shortlist in Table 2, the citation should be given.

The limitations of this difficult work are stated; however two other problematic issues should be mentioned.

One of them is that not only the existence of guidelines for occupational diseases is important, but also their good quality and balance. Severe dysfunction of the registry might be caused by the fact that the system overestimates one disease and underestimates another one.

If the criterion for the severity of an occupational disease is very strict, and the damage needed is very high, its value both the monitoring and alerting function of the register is low. The noise-induced hearing loss can serve as a good example where severe criteria lead to underestimation of the problem. The same applies to the severity of silicosis and asbestosis, because different ILO classification level is required in different countries.

Similarly, criterion for evaluation of the exposure plays a role, especially in diseases frequent in the general population such as dysphonia or musculoskeletal disorders. In some countries simply the “occupation” and defined length of exposure are requested. In contrast, in other countries measurements of the frequency of movements and physical forces measurements of respective muscles using integrated electromyography in the worker are required to prove sufficient exposure.

In addition, the authors did not consider the question concerning the possible conflict of interests of physicians who notify and acknowledge occupational diseases. In some countries the physicians are employed by social/accident insurance companies remunerating the compensation to the worker, and in others by hospitals or universities.

In conclusion, the authors of this manuscript are focusing on a very broad and
important problem, and they studied it using an original method. The audit tool developed by them appears a reasonable and practical approach to improve the function of our registries. It is easy to apply and can serve as a good starting point for every national registry of occupational diseases.

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

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.