

## Workers' Back Pain: Causes, Costs & Solution

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You will want to share two important papers published in the past several months. Why? When read separately, each provides valuable information relevant to your patients, community and practice; together, they tell a compelling story.

### Examining Workplace Risk Factors for LBP

The [first paper](#) comes from the *Journal of Manipulative and Physiological Therapeutics (JMPT)*.<sup>1</sup> The authors examined how certain workplace risk factors impact the prevalence of low-back pain (LBP). Here are some of their important findings:

- More than a fourth of workers experienced LBP in the previous three months (25.7 percent).
- Female and older workers were at increased risk for LBP.
- Women working 41-45 hours a week and young people working more than 60 hours had an increased risk of LBP.
- Work-family imbalance, a hostile work environment and job insecurity were significantly associated with LBP.

### Treatment Options: DC vs. MD vs. PT Care

The [second paper](#), published in the *Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation*, also looked at workers' back pain.<sup>2</sup> This paper examines provider effectiveness through the lens of worker's compensation costs. The authors evaluated the experience of workers with back pain who saw a DC, MD or PT and discovered the following:

- [T]he median number of days of the first episode of any wage compensation were 8.0 (95% CI 6.6-9.4), 10.0 (95% CI 9.5-10.0) and 25.0 (95% CI 20.3-29.7) for the workers who first consulted chiropractors, physicians and physiotherapists, respectively."
- 15.0% (n = 92) of the chiropractic care seekers, 16.2% (n = 738) of the physician care seekers and 23.7% (n = 40) of the physiotherapist care seekers had a second compensation episode."
- When compared with medical doctors, chiropractors were associated with shorter durations of compensation and physiotherapists with longer ones. Physiotherapists were also associated with higher odds of a second episode of financial compensation."
- These differences raise concerns regarding the use of physiotherapists as gatekeepers for the worker's compensation system."

Together, these studies tell employers that one-fourth of their workers will have back pain each quarter. Women, older workers, those working significant overtime and workers under certain psychosocial pressures will experience more back pain, leading to more time off work and lost productivity.

However, they can help offset these challenges by encouraging their workers to seek chiropractic care. Chiropractic care has been shown to shorten the time off work, reduce the likelihood of

relapse and save substantial amounts of money in worker's compensation claims and lost production - more than any other provider.

### Let Employers Know

Unfortunately, most employers will never see these studies or hear this important information. This is where you come in.

Begin to share this information with your patients, particularly the ones who are in management positions. Make an appointment with local businesspeople in your area regarding how to reduce worker's compensation costs and lost production in their company. Write a cover letter (use the content in this article shamelessly) and let the business leaders in your community know you have important information that can save them money.

A little action on your part can change the understanding and appreciation of chiropractic for literally thousands of workers. It's well-worth the time and effort required.

### References

1. Yang H, Haldeman S, Lu M-L, Baker D. Low back pain prevalence and related workplace psychosocial risk factors: a study using data from the 2010 National Health Interview Survey. *J Manipulative Physiol Ther*, 2016;39:459-472.
2. Blanchette M, Rivard M, Dionne CE, et al. Association between the type of first healthcare provider and the duration of financial compensation for occupational back pain. *J Occup Rehabil*, 2016 Sep 17 (epub ahead of print).

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NOVEMBER 2016