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Maine Institute of Occupational Health Education

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During the fall of 1991 and winter of 1992, a survey of occupational health practices was mailed to 1192 physicians in Maine in cooperation with the Maine Academy of Family Practice, the Maine Osteopathic Association, the Maine Medical Association, and the Maine Thoracic Society. Specialties surveyed included the primary care specialties - general practice, family practice, internal medicine, and obstetrics and gynecology - as well as a several specialties which have the potential for dealing with occupational cases: emergency medicine, hematology, occupational medicine, oncology, ophthalmology, physical medicine and rehabilitation, pulmonology, orthopedic surgery, and thoracic surgery. Six hundred and five surveys were returned, for a response rate of 51% (calculated after all retired and inappropriate specialty respondents were removed from the respondent pool). Only one survey was mailed to respondents; there were no mail or telephone follow-up contacts.

**SURVEY RESULTS**

1. **How would you describe your practice?**

   - 9% General Practice
   - 37% Family Practice
   - 10% Internal Medicine
   - 8% Emergency Medicine
   - 5% Ophthalmology
   - 7% OB/GYN
   - 3% Pulmonology
   - 1% Hematology/oncology
   - 6% Orthopedic Surgery
   - 10% Other

2. **How often would you estimate that you see visits for work-related injuries and illnesses in your practice?**

   - 3% Never
   - 14% Rarely (once every 3 or 4 months)
   - 21% Occasionally (once or twice per month)
   - 62% Frequently (weekly or more)
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3. Check the three most frequently seen work-related injuries or illnesses in your practice (ranking of top five responses):

1. Musculoskeletal injuries: sprains and strains to back, spine and extremities
2. Repetitive motion injuries: tendonitis, carpal tunnel, etc.
3. Lung diseases: asbestosis, lung cancer, occupational asthma, etc.
4. Occupational cancers (other than lung): leukemia, bladder, liver, mesothelioma, etc.
5. Toxic exposures: heavy metals, solvents, PCBs, etc.
6. Soft tissue trauma: lacerations, contusions, etc.
7. Cardiovascular diseases: hypertension, MI, etc.
8. Reproductive disorders: infertility, spontaneous abortion, etc.
9. Neurotoxic disorders: peripheral neuropathy, toxic encephalitis, etc.
10. Noise-induced loss of hearing
11. Eye injuries: foreign body, corneal abrasion, conjunctivitis, etc.
12. Dermatologic conditions: dematoses, burns, etc.
13. Psychologic disorders: neuroses, alcoholism, drug dependency, etc.

Note: Musculoskeletal and repetitive motion injuries were by far the most frequently chosen categories, chosen by 87% and 75% of the respondents, respectively.
4. **Circle the illness or injury for which you have the hardest time finding information (top three choices listed):**

   #1 - Toxic exposures  
   #2 - Psychological disorders  
   #3 - A tie among four categories: musculoskeletal injuries, repetitive motion injuries, reproductive disorders, and neurotoxic disorders

5. **My patients frequently ask questions about the following work-related issues (ranking of top three responses):**

   ___ Trauma  
   ___ Lung diseases  
   ___ Respiratory irritants  
   2 ___ Repetitive motion  
   3 ___ Toxic exposures  
   ___ Reproductive disorders  
   1 ___ Returning to work following illness or injury  
   ___ I am rarely asked anything about work-related illness  
   ___ Other

*Note: Returning to work following illness or injury was the overwhelmingly predominant category, chosen by 76% of the respondents, with repetitive motion chosen by 45%.*
6. Where do you obtain needed information when trying to identify, diagnose, or treat an occupational illness or injury? (ranking of top three responses)

1. Consulting physicians
3. Journal articles
2. Textbooks
2. Computer databases
2. Public health agencies: (Maine Bureau of Health, CDC, NIOSH)
2. Rarely seek information
2. Other

7. Circle your most frequently used source of information in the list above.

The most frequently used source is consulting physicians.

8. How would you categorize the availability of occupational health information resources?

18% Many available, easy to use
15% Many available, difficult to use
59% Few available
8% Basically nonexistent
9. How useful would a toll-free telephone information number providing expert occupational health information and consultation (similar to the Poison Control hotline) be to you in your practice?

- 14% Not useful at all
- 51% Somewhat useful
- 27% Very useful
- 8% Tremendously useful

10. What do you usually do when you are stumped by a suspected work-related case?

- 74% Seek in-state-consultation
- 5% Seek out-of-state consultation
- 12% Send patient to a hospital-based or free-standing occupational health clinic
- 9% Other

11. When dealing with occupational injury or illness, what subject areas do you want to know more about? (ranking of top three responses)

- Taking an appropriate occupational history
- Determining work-relatedness of illness or injury
- Causation and diagnosis of occupational illness/injury
- Disease and exposure patterns within the community
- Toxicological principles (exposure, latency, dose-response, etc.)
- Assessing impairment and/or disability
- Developing appropriate treatment plans (medicines, PT, light duty)
- Role of primary care providers in the workers' compensation system
- Prevention of occupational illness or injury
- Specific diseases or conditions
- Other
12. If you ranked all your continuing education needs, occupational health would fall:

10% At or near the top
52% In the middle
38% At or near the bottom

13. I am likely to use the following for continuing medical education (ranking of top three responses):

2 Grand rounds/hospital rounds
___ Case conferences at community hospitals on occupationally-related illness
___ Week-long "mini-residency" on occupational illness
1 Day-long conference
___ Videotaped educational session
3 Self-education module
___ Other

14. Circle the education format above that you would most prefer.
The most preferred education format is the day-long conference.