



Position Paper VIII

Fostering health workforce employability by tackling MSDs

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Health and elderly care workers have high rates of injuries and illnesses at the workplace, and both their absence from work due to illness (absenteeism) or working ill (presenteeism) can compromise the quality of care delivered and even patient safety. Musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) are one of the most common work-related ailments. Keeping elderly care workers healthy has a direct and measurable positive impact on productivity, and contributes to improving the elderly care worker's employability. Preventing elderly care workers from suffering MSDs and promoting workers' health throughout their working life is key to allowing them to work for longer, and happier. Tackling MSDs helps improve the lives of workers, but it also makes good business sense.

Some facts and figures :

- 24.2 % of workers consider that their health and safety is at risk because of their work, and 25 % declare that work has a mainly negative effect on their health. According to a recent Eurobarometer survey, workers consider stress to be one of the main occupational risks (53%), followed by ergonomic risks (repetitive movements or tiring or painful positions (28%) and lifting carrying or moving loads on a daily basis (24%);
- According to the European Commission's Social Investment Package, evidence-based interventions in the workplace to promote health could save € 135 billion yearly; the employers due to absenteeism and presenteeism (€ 270 billion); the economy in terms of lost output (€ 240 billion); the healthcare systems due to treatment costs (€ 60 billion); the social welfare systems due to disability benefit payments (€ 40 billion);
- Musculoskeletal disorders are one of the most common work-related ailments. Most

work-related MSDs develop over time. There is usually no single cause of MSDs; various factors often work in combination;

- Musculoskeletal disorders usually affect the back, neck, shoulders and upper limbs. Health problems range from minor aches and pains to more serious medical conditions requiring time off or medical treatment. In more chronic cases, they can even lead to disability and the need to give up work.
- In The Netherlands e.g., 85% of all elderly care workers report physical problems. 23% say they can't perform because of back, neck and shoulder disorders;
- Prevention of MSDs in elderly care sectors could be fostered by making existing standards more transparent or better known: staffing norms may not be known or adhered to. Secondly, inefficient organisation, prohibitive costs, inadequate skills, and insufficient time prevent supervisors from providing supportive supervision to staff. And thirdly, good working conditions (adequate supplies, updated and available equipment) is the most obvious preventive measurement.

EAHSA therefore calls for Member States, all stakeholders and the aged care services and housing sectors :

- To foster the employability of elderly care workers;
- To promote the implementation and adherence to existing regulations, norms and standards, e.g. ISOTR12296, for healthy workplaces;
- To invest in communication, training and supportive environments of elderly care workers.