

Musculoskeletal disorders take up 16% of direct, 40% of indirect health care resources

New study from Germany shows some parallels to United States on lost work days from MSDs.

by Stephen B. Sherretta

ORTHOPAEDICS TODAY EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Musculoskeletal disorders account for some 16% of direct and 40% of indirect health care costs in Germany, including 18% of hospital days and 40% of inpatient rehabilitation.

Those numbers come from data collected by the German Network of the Bone and Joint Decade. Researcher **Karsten Dreinhöfer, MD**, said the data include all musculoskeletal conditions plus "injuries," two-thirds of which are musculoskeletal related.

The Bone and Joint Decade counts musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) among the most costly medical problems, noting they affect one in every three adults and remain some of the least-understood diseases. At the same time, readily available preventive measures, notably for osteoporosis, osteoarthritis and injuries, often get overlooked. That leads to extra health care spending.

So with the number of people older than 50 years with MSDs expected to double over the next 15 years, the new German study took a comprehensive measure of the problem.

Similar in the United States

Some of the numbers from that

German study mirror those in the United States. For example, in 2003 MSDs accounted for of 33% lost work days in the United States (not including disorders caused by slips, trips, falls, motor vehicle accidents or similar accidents). In Germany the roughly comparable number is 29%, suggesting that the German experience has important parallels for many industrialized countries.

The purpose of the German study: to raise awareness. "We are talking about the individual burden of disease due to restrictions brought by pain, disability, restriction of activity and participation," Dreinhöfer said.

"We are talking about, on the society level, of the real burden on all of us, hospital administrations, outpatient visits, rehabilitation, sickness leave and early retirement." Dreinhöfer is director of development for the Bone and Joint Decade and also deputy head of the department of orthopaedics at Ulm University in Germany.

During the period studied, direct health care costs for MSDs plus injuries outstripped spending in each of the next two biggest categories – cardiovascular and digestive.

"If you look at what percentage of the population requires a consultation with an orthopaedist for musculoskeletal conditions, you come to realize that about every third German is consulting at least once a year,"

Dreinhöfer said. "Interestingly, if you look at other specialties – on an outpatient basis – about every third patient going to a general practitioner is complaining about a musculoskeletal condition, and there is a

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—Karsten Dreinhöfer

similar percentage in surgical offices, and the same – about every third patient – in internal medicine."

Reducing disease and costs

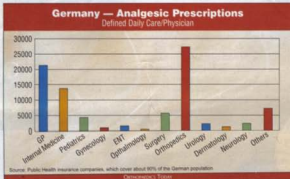
And given aging populations and lifestyle changes, expect these costs to grow smartly, Dreinhöfer told ORTHOPAEDICS TODAY. The best thing orthopaedists can do: prevent the avoidable "burden of disease," defined by the Bone and Joint Decade as the difference between the actual burden of disease and what can be achieved by state-of-the-art treatment to alleviate it. For early-stage osteoporosis, for example, that means identifying the person at risk before the first fracture and providing preventive treatment. In later stages, following and osteoporotic fracture, it is even more crucial to start medical treatment immediately to prevent further fractures, Dreinhöfer said.

In later stages of osteoarthritis it would mean "... operating at the appropriate time so that the deterioration of the disease is not diminishing the quality of life too much ..." and preventing limited mobility from leading to further costly declines in health, including cardiovascular problems and depression, Dreinhöfer added.

He and his colleagues collected their data from government agencies, insurance companies, pension funds, hospital discharge reports and other sources. Dreinhöfer also presented his study at the 7th European Federation of National Associations of Orthopaedics and Traumatology Congress last June. **OTI**

For more information:

Dreinhöfer K, Mersch H, Wulfhart P. Burden of musculoskeletal conditions in Germany in the Bone and Joint Decade. Presented at the European Federation of National Associations of Orthopaedics and Traumatology 7th Congress, June 4-7, 2005, Lisbon.



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Further information: ▶ Hans-Joachim Wilke, Institute of Orthopaedic Research and Biomechanics, Hebelstraße 34, 89081 Ulm, Germany. Tel.: +49(731) 502 34 82. Fax: +49(731) 502 34 98. Email: hans.joachim.wilke@med.uni-ulm.de

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