

From the Editors

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# Introduction to the special issue on work-related pain

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Dear colleagues,

In 2002, Gordon Waddell and Kim Burton published a book with the catchy title: *Is Work Good for your Health and Wellbeing?* And indeed, work can in many ways be regarded as one of the primary human needs. In general, work may provide a source of income, contribute to social contacts, and is for many an important life value, providing social and intellectual growth. In musculoskeletal rehabilitation, return to work is often identified as one of the main targets and work may serve as the best context for rehabilitation after musculoskeletal injuries.

Yet, there is much to overcome to make work a healthy place for everyone. While we see that physical demanding work is a significant risk factor for musculoskeletal injury, safety at the workplace is a prerequisite for a healthy work environment. Especially within low- and middle-income countries, work circumstances can be considered poor in some industries. In Western society, with growing demands, a 24-online culture is introduced, leading to a blurring of boundaries between private and professional life. Increasingly, people call absent from work because of a continuous stressing system, leading to burnout, depression, fibromyalgia or other chronic pain conditions.

To address these challenges, the market is overwhelmed by many ergonomic solutions, from smart

mouses and ergonomic desks to exoskeletons that actively assist in reducing loads on the back or limbs to make work less demanding. While most of these interventions are validated in lab settings, there is much less evidence of proper use in daily work. Widescale implementation of these ergonomics remains absent and their true value and use is still not clear enough.

As Editors-in-Chief of two IOS Press sister journals, *WORK: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment (WORK)* and *Journal of Back and Musculoskeletal Rehabilitation (JBMR)*, we therefore decided to join forces and publish this special issue that is fully dedicated to address the pressing need to study the balance on the cutting edge of social and health research. We aim to raise awareness of the challenges we face and propose a call for action to make work a safe place for every individual, where they can evolve and build up a fair income to support lives. We need to shift away from the vision to work as just a risk factor, towards a situation in which wellbeing, life values, development and health are the outcomes. We can learn so much from those enduring in work despite having musculoskeletal conditions, how employers actively support people with disabilities, minority backgrounds, or older age.

Therefore, increasing cooperation between *WORK* and *JBMR* may set an example to diminish barriers between the work and health domain. This

issue is entirely dedicated to those researchers on this pressing cutting edge. We sincerely encourage researchers, clinicians, employers and policy makers to continue this important topic and continue to create awareness to improve work circumstances for all individuals across the globe.

This issue contains 15 papers related to pain on topics such as burnout, work ability, quality of life, occupational rehabilitation, return to work, and ergonomics. The Editors' Choice paper is *Efficacy of occupational rehabilitation in return to work for back pain: A systematic literature review* authored by Kalski, Völkel, Häußler, and Wolfarth. Conducting a systematic review on a particular topic holds significant value because it promotes evidence-based decision making, identifies research gaps, reduces bias, standardizes methodologies, informs practice and policy, saves time and resources, and enhances transparency in the research process. As the authors reported, in this systematic review, we learned that, "A combination of activity, maintenance therapy, stretching, and manual therapy showed promising

results in improving . . ." return to work (RTW) and that "... the relationship and mediation between employer/workplace and employee seems to be an important aspect of RTW. However, pain intensity, disability, and QOL were enhanced with interventions that included a high proportion of physical activity". Based on the 4,010 articles retrieved and the 20 that met the inclusion criteria of the systematic review, "the intervention programs differed widely, leading to the assumption that the treatment effect of the intervention programs is not established, yet".

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With appreciation,

Karen and Remko  
Editors-in-Chief  
WORK and JBMR