

Socio-demographic factors influence costs of back pain

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It is well-known that back pain belongs to the most frequent health problems in the industrial nations and, it is also well-known that it is the cause of considerable costs for health insurance schemes and the economy. In the period of just one year, 70 % of adult Germans suffer from back pain.

Together with scientists from the Institute for Community Medicine of the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität in Greifswald, Christina Wenig and Bernd Schweikert of the Institute of Health Economics and Health Care Management of the Helmholtz Zentrum München - German Research Center for Environmental Health have now scrutinized socio-demographic variables of patients as potential cost-influencing parameters.

For the first time, in a German so-called "Bottom-up study", scientists examined how gender, age, education and marital status might possibly affect the costs caused by back pain. The advantage of this method is that the most important components of costs were able to be identified, and also variability and distribution of costs could be explained. 9,267 Germans were included in questioning by the German Back Pain Research Network (GBPRN); the result was extrapolated to the whole population aged 18 to 75. The results were accepted for publication in the *European Journal of Pain*.

The team found out that on average a cost of € 1,322 per patient per annum was caused by back pain. Direct costs, namely expenses, which

originated out of treating the pain, were 46 %. Correspondingly, indirect costs, namely losses of production, stood at about 54 %. The highest costs occurred at the age of 50. Among patients who claimed benefits, social circumstances such as unemployment, low education and living alone also appeared to increase costs. The researchers found the clearest correlation between pain grade and costs. Altogether the researchers estimated the costs caused by back pain in Germany at € 48.9 billion that is 2.2 % of the German Gross Domestic Product. Expenses caused by prevention or therapy measures represented a share in of 9.7 %. Patients had also often to pay out of their own pocket.

The study results suggest that effective prevention programs can lower expenses both in the private and public sectors. In addition, the knowledge can help to direct main focuses of research as well as to use the budget sensibly for innovative medical strategies.

Source: German Research Center for Environmental Health

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