

at work

Information on workplace research from the Institute for Work & Health

This Issue

For Clinicians

Evaluating low-back pain information on the Internet; The Cochrane Back Review Group

For Workplace

Canadian Nurses' Health Study

For Policy

Health and Income; Income for injured employees; US compensation conference

For Researchers

Institute senior scientist receives prestigious research award; Institute researchers take active role at epidemiology conference

This Issue's Supplement

The health of workers in the health sector has been affected by an organizational and work environment that is in a state of rapid change. Increases in the intensity and volume of physical work, together with increases in social and psychological demands, are having a detrimental effect on their health.

To be notified by e-mail when a new issue of *At Work* is published and available on our Web site, send your e-mail address to atwork@iwh.on.ca.



Research Excellence
Advancing Employee Health

Search on for New President



Terrence Sullivan, President

After eight years at the helm of the Institute for Work & Health, Terrence Sullivan is leaving for a new post. As of July 1, Sullivan will assume new responsibilities as Vice President, Preventive Oncology at Cancer Care Ontario. It is anticipated that he will maintain a link with the Institute on some policy research initiatives.

With the Institute since 1993, Sullivan was the driving force behind the organization's growth, maturation, and launch onto the international research scene. During his tenure, the Institute developed relationships and partnerships with stakeholders and other research organizations at the provincial, national, and international levels. He championed the Institute with the Ontario Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB), key corporate leaders, labour representatives,

numerous government agencies, and policy-makers.

Sullivan was one of the founding researchers involved in the proposal of the Health Evidence Application and Linkages Network (HEALNet) and led the development of its workplace health theme. He also strengthened and formalized Institute ties with three Canadian universities (University of Toronto, University of Waterloo, McMaster University). On the international front, Sullivan is credited with opening up the lines of communication between North American and European researchers and compensation boards when the Institute hosted the 4th International Congress on Medical-Legal Aspects of Work Injuries in 1999.

"Under Terry's leadership, the Institute has become a (continued on page 2 ←)

The Institute for Work & Health is an independent, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to research and promote new ways to prevent workplace disability, improve treatment, and optimize recovery and safe return-to-work.

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WEB SITE UPDATE

The Institute's major report to the Research Advisory Committee (RAC) for 2000 is now available electronically on the Web site. The RAC is an international group of scientists who provide overall advice on the Institute's research program.

The report is a detailed catalogue of the Institute's research. For the first time, a section on the expanded Return-to-Work Studies program is part of the document.

A list of Institute publications, grants, presentations, and activities is also included.

"This is one of the most complete and comprehensive documents the Institute produces and by far the most detailed," says Scientific Director Cameron Mustard. "By posting it on our Web site, it provides our stakeholders easier access to our research program and Institute initiatives."

Each research area has a separate section which includes a program overview, staff listing and a link to a more detailed breakdown of the area's various projects. This report is provided in Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF).

To access the report, go to the Institute's site (www.iwh.on.ca). Under the Spotlight Section, click on the Report on 2000 graphic.



SAFETY INTERVENTION EVALUATION



As promised in the April issue of *At Work*, the *Guide to Evaluating the Effectiveness of Strategies for Preventing Work Injuries: How to Show Whether a Safety Intervention Really Works* is now available for download.

The book provides students, researchers and practitioners with the tools and concepts required to conduct systematic evaluations of injury prevention initiatives and safety programs.

Users have the option of either downloading the entire book or downloading chapter by chapter. All parts of the book are available as PDFs. To access the book, click on the graphic located on the home page under the Spotlight section.

Questions or comments about the Institute's Web site may be directed to Web Coordinator Katherine Lukewich at klukewich@iwh.on.ca.

NEW PRESIDENT...

(Continued from page 1) recognized leader on work-health research and work-related musculoskeletal disorders," says Dr. Lorna R. Marsden, Chair of the Institute's Board of Directors. "We are now looking for someone who will build on Terry's accomplishments and carry the organization forward in the coming years."

This spring, the board struck a search committee to begin the task of finding a replacement. Janet Wright and Associates Inc., an executive search firm, is assisting in the search for Sullivan's successor.



Clinical

EVALUATING LOW-BACK PAIN INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET

When you search for information on the World Wide Web using a search engine and key words, chances are you may be hit with a huge mess of information overload. And what you get may not be of high quality — especially when it comes to medical information.

A team of Institute researchers evaluated the quality, credibility and nature of information that's available on the Internet on low-back pain. The study's findings were published in the medical journal, *Spine*.

“Out of the 74 Web sites we reviewed, only nine of the sites were identified as high quality. This was based on pre-determined criteria,” says Manager of Information Systems Emma Irvin and one of the study's researchers. “Of all the sites that were evaluated, 80 per cent had advertising as their main focus.”

The Web site research was initially conducted in 1996 and the sites were again reviewed after two years. After this time, seven of the nine sites that were identified initially were still of high quality. The criteria used to determine whether a site was of high quality included content analysis, overall quality and a recommendations section.

The researchers selected five search engines and entered two separate key terms. They then examined the top 20 titles from the search engines and determined whether they were related to low-back pain. In total, 109 sites were found, although only 74 Web sites were reviewed because duplicate sites and broken links were removed.

To view the low-back pain sites that were identified by the study as high quality, visit the Institute's Web site and click on Publications, then Cochrane Back Group Reviews 🏔️

For more information about this study contact Emma Irvin at eirvin@iwh.on.ca

COCHRANE COLLABORATION BACK REVIEW GROUP

The Cochrane Back Review Group is helping policy makers understand the essentials of evidence-based decision making, and where to find the evidence. The group, which is housed at the Institute, is part of the University of Toronto Site Group of the Canadian Cochrane Network and Centre.



In April, the Back Review Group introduced the Cochrane Library to personnel at the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care as part of a workshop on evidence-based policy decision making. The workshop was designed with input from the Ministry to respond to the specific needs and interest of policy makers. Participants were taught how to train others within their organization in principles of evidence-based decision making, as well as use of the Cochrane Library.

The learning activities included

interactive presentations and a demonstration of the Cochrane Library. Participants received hands-on practice accessing and searching the library with the assistance of tutors.

The participants' feedback was very positive. A half-day follow-up session took place in May to deal with questions, problems, or concerns that people have experienced when using the Cochrane Library following the workshop. That session included the identification and demonstration of alternate sources of evidence on the Internet, as well as discussion of the expectations of the participants as trainers, and the resources they will need to fulfill their role.

The University of Toronto Cochrane Site Group is hopeful that this will be a first of a series of workshops devoted to Cochrane and evidence-based policy decision making with the Ministry. 🏔️

CLINICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Research Associate Sherra Solway and Carol Kennedy, research assistant, both received Rising Star awards at the University of Toronto's physiotherapy research day. The awards are in recognition of their excellence in teaching in the physiotherapy program. Kennedy is a lecturer and Solway has been a teaching assistant in the program.



Sherra Solway

Meanwhile, Jill Hayden and Andrea Furlan have both been awarded three-year post-doctoral fellowships from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). Furlan works with the Cochrane Collaboration's

Back Review Group and Hayden is a student researcher at the Institute. As well, Carlo Ammendolia, an adjunct scientist at the Institute, received the CIHR / Canadian Memorial Chiropractic College Postdoctoral Partnership Award, a three-year fellowship. 🏔️



Andrea Furlan



Policy Makers

HEALTH AND INCOME

The relationship between an individual's income and their health is both complex and multi-faceted. While the effects of low income on health are well established in the research literature, the role played by income inequality (the distribution of individual income within an area) is still unclear.

Chris McLeod, a research associate at the Institute, is examining these questions. His report, "Income Inequality and Health in Canada at the Metropolitan Level: A Longitudinal Analysis," examines the impact of income inequality on self-reported health status (SRHS) over time in 53 Canadian cities.

McLeod used data from three waves of the National Population Health Survey and the 1991 Canadian census and he held constant factors other than individual household income, median share of total area household income (income inequality), and average area household income.

The research showed the expected association between individual income and SRHS. Those with lower levels of income had higher probabilities of reporting poor or fair health. While examining the impact of income inequality, McLeod found that low income inequality was associated with a small increase in reporting poor or fair health at follow-up. Further, in areas with low income inequality, individual income had a stronger protective effect on SRHS than in high income inequality areas. Consistent with previous research, this study indicates that unlike the United States, in Canadian cities there does not appear to be a positive relationship between high income inequality and poor health.

McLeod will be presenting his work at the International Health Economics Association conference. The iHEA conference takes place at the University of York in the United Kingdom this July. A paper based on this study is currently being reviewed for publication. 🏔️

For more information on this research project, contact Chris McLeod, Research Associate, at cmcleod@iwh.on.ca.

INCOME FOR INJURED EMPLOYEES

When a worker has sustained a permanent impairment due to a work-related accident, what are her or his primary sources of income? This



Emile Tompa

question is being addressed by a new project at the Institute, led by Associate Scientist Emile Tompa.

The study focuses on two primary concerns. First, how successful

are individuals with permanent impairments at finding work? Second, what proportion of pre-accident earnings is recouped through employment income, workers' compensation benefits and other sources?

Additionally, the study will investigate regional differences in finding work, primary income sources of individuals and their families, and family formation and dissolution patterns after the accident.

Tompa's research is being undertaken in collaboration with the Ontario Workplace Safety & Insurance Board (WSIB) and Statistics Canada using anonymized, aggregate-level data from Ontario. Two cohorts will be examined: one group sustained an injury prior to 1990, the other after 1990. These two samples have been chosen because the WSIB (formerly the Workers' Compensation Board of Ontario) significantly changed its benefit awards program for workers with permanent impairments in 1990. 🏔️

US COMPENSATION CONFERENCE

The Institute's scientific director, Cameron Mustard, will be taking part in the 25th Annual National Symposium on Workers' Compensation.

The conference is being held in Chicago from July 15-17. It is co-directed by John Burton of the School of Management and Labor Relations at Rutgers University and Ed Welch of the Workers' Compensation Center at Michigan State University. Welch is also a member of the Institute's Board of Directors.

Attention will focus on the current and controversial issues facing the workers' compensation system. Mustard is presenting as part of a session on recent declines in workplace injuries and workers' compensation claims.

Participants include workers, employers, and insurance advocates, as well as policy-makers, compensation agencies and researchers. For information on the conference contact the Workers' Compensation Center, or visit www.lir.msu.edu/wcc. 🏔️



Workplace

CANADIAN NURSES' HEALTH STUDY

A project, led by Mickey Kerr from the Institute and Heather Laschinger from the University of Western Ontario, will be creating a model for the surveillance of nurses' health. The study is jointly funded by the Canadian Health Services Research Foundation (CHSRF) Nursing Research Fund, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, and Health Canada.

The project will synthesize existing information about the health of nurses in Canada to identify key



Mickey Kerr

variables that contribute to their major health problems. It will describe the work-related factors that contribute to these conditions, particularly those relating to hospital restructuring and organizational change.

In the second phase, the researchers will work with stakeholders and use the variables to develop a model for monitoring nurses' health on an ongoing basis. Ultimately, the model could contribute to the development of workplace best practices aimed at improving nurses' health and well-being. 🏔️

UPCOMING CONFERENCE

The Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada (AWCBC) are hosting the first Public Forum on Knowledge Transfer, being held in Toronto November 18-20, 2001. The forum will bring together workplace partners, key researchers, practitioners, and decision makers to discuss the theme of new and emerging best practices to reduce work-related injury and illness.

Terrence Sullivan, former Institute president, and Vice-President, Preventative Oncology at Cancer Care Ontario, is chairing the program committee. More information on the forum is available from the AWCBC Web site: www.awcbc.ca. 🏔️



Research

INSTITUTE SENIOR SCIENTIST RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS RESEARCH AWARD

For the first time in the award's 13-year history, the 2001 University of Toronto's Department of Medicine Research Award was given to a scientist who conducts clinical (patient-based) research.

Institute Senior Scientist Dr. Claire Bombardier was recognized for her continuous excellence and outstanding contributions to research.

Previous recipients were acknowledged for their advances in basic science.

Dr. Bombardier said that receiving this honour sends a clear and "very important message to young people in that the patient-based research they are



Dr. Bombardier

doing is recognized and of value."

Both Physician-in-Chiefs from Mount Sinai Hospital and the University Health Network nominated Dr. Bombardier. In their joint nomination letter, they described her as "one of Canada's pre-

eminent clinician-scientists and one of the world's leading investigators in the area of health outcomes in rheumatic diseases."

In their nomination letter, the Physician-in-Chiefs highlighted three factors in

Dr. Bombardier's career: grants received (she has been principal or co-investigator in 49 grants), publications (147 published papers in peer-reviewed journals), and scientific citations (1,465 citations).

As the sole recipient of this award, Dr. Bombardier was "surprised" that she had won.

"I was surprised and speechless when I found out I won," Dr. Bombardier said. "I was convinced I was not going to win because, in the past, it was awarded to individuals who made contributions to basic science."

The support she has received from the Institute over the past 11 years was one major factor in receiving this award because the Institute provided her the opportunity to devote time to her research in a multidisciplinary environment, she said.

At the awards ceremony, Dr. Bombardier made a presentation entitled. "From evidence-based medicine back to doctors know best: Why we need a new paradigm for clinical research." She emphasized the need to consult with physicians to determine what clinical questions and opportunities need to be examined. 🏔️

INSTITUTE RESEARCHERS TAKE ACTIVE ROLE AT EPIDEMIOLOGY CONFERENCE

More than 10 Institute researchers presented their research findings at June's North American epidemiology conference in Toronto. Congress 2001 is sponsored by four major epidemiology organizations.

"This the first time American and Canadian epidemiological societies came together to talk about common epidemiological issues," said Institute Scientist Jennifer Payne, who is also secretary-treasurer for the Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics, one of the sponsoring organizations.

Each of the Institute's four research areas were represented at the conference.

From the Population/Workforce Studies group, researcher Curtis Breslin presented "A longitudinal study examining the effects of unemployment on adults."

This study examined the effects of unemployment on emotional distress in adults aged 18 to 64. Using data from a general population survey with more than 5,000 respondents, Institute researchers

evaluated changes in distress during sustained employment or unemployment or as people moved between employment and unemployment.

A number of other Institute projects were profiled at the conference by the principal investigators (as listed) and members of their team. They included:

Jacob Etches

Individual and neighbourhood socio-economic predictors of chronic health problems and consequent activity restriction: an application of multilevel modelling to 1990 OHS data (oral presentation)

Cameron Mustard

Position in the occupational hierarchy and decline in perceived health status (poster presentation)

Peter Smith

Examining the association between occupational position and the stability of sense of coherence in a Canadian working population (poster presentation)

Selahadin Ibrahim

Work stressors predicting repetitive strain injuries (poster presentation)

Emile Tompa

The challenges of operationalizing disablement theory in the context of secondary data sources (poster presentation)

Jennifer Payne

Health care utilization for workers with soft tissue injuries (poster presentation)

Donald Cole

Predictors of case level transitions for work-related musculoskeletal disorders (poster presentation)

Mieke Koehoorn

When is a musculoskeletal injury an injury? (poster presentation)

Harry Shannon

Under-reporting of work injuries (poster presentation)

Pierre Côté

Two poster presentations: A prognostic study of low back pain resulting from traffic collisions & Health-care utilization or back and neck pain in Saskatchewan

For further information, visit Congress 2001's Web site at: www.epi2001.org 🏔️

IWH News

MOVE

The Institute for Work & Health will be in its new office beginning Monday, June 25. The office is located at 481 University Avenue, Suite 800, Toronto, ON, M5G 2E9. All of our phone, fax and internet contact information will remain the same. The Institute will be closed on June 22 to facilitate the move. We invite everyone to visit us in our new space.

STAFF

John Lavis, a scientist at the Institute, has been offered a Canadian Institutes of Health Research New Investigator Award for his research program titled "Knowledge transfer and uptake in health policy-making environments." Lavis has also received a funding award from the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's Making Research Relevant: Building Capacity in Ontario competition. Lavis' work for this project will focus on best practices in research transfer.

Alina Gildiner, the 2001 Mustard Fellow, is now Dr. Alina Gildiner, after successfully defending her doctoral thesis. Her thesis examined the privatization of Ontario's rehabilitation sector through three successive ideologically distinct provincial administrations.

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