



Editorial comment

Low back pain among nurses: Common cause of lost days at work and contributing to the worldwide shortage of nurses

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In this issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Pain*, Saurab Sharma from Kathmandu University Hospital in Nepal and coworkers report on pain related factors that are associated with lost work days in nurses with low back pain [1]. Of 111 female nurses working in Nepal that participated in the study, 65% reported that they had low back pain. It is well documented that low back pain is one of the most common causes of disability, and that low back pain is particularly prevalent among nurses. Thus, in a study from Qatar the one-year prevalence of low back pain for nurses was 54% [2]. In a cross-sectional study to determine the prevalence for low back pain among nurses in a Nigerian hospital and an Ethiopian hospital, the 12 months prevalence of low back pain was 71% [3].

The nurses in Nepal, because of their low back pain, reported a loss of 7 workdays (less than 2%) during one year (range from 0 to 14 days). In the study from East-Africa nurses lost 202 days (0.15%) of the total working (131,400) days, which is low. The mean age of the nurses from Nepal was 24 years with a range from 19 to 40 years. Even if the numbers of lost work days are low, one has to be aware of the fact that the young nurses in the samples have many years working in the future.

One of the strengths of the study of Sharma et al. [1] is that they also investigated factors that could impact on lost work days. They found that having constant pain and having a low back pain

problem that was alleviated by rest were factors significantly associated with lost work days. Pain intensity was only weakly associated with lost work days. This finding emphasizes that further research should be done to increase knowledge about factors that are associated with lost work days. This may lead to better management of low back pain among nurses and hopefully reduce sick leaves, and hopefully this may prevent nurses from quitting their work because of such health problems. This is important because there is a worldwide shortage of nurses, and studies show that shortages of nurses are ranked as one of the greatest threats to patient safety [4].

References

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