

THOR ROI

The Health and Occupation Reporting
network in the Republic of Ireland

INTRODUCTION

August 2008

The Health and Occupation Reporting Network (THOR) is a network of physician led voluntary surveillance schemes to monitor the incidence and determinants of occupational disease and work-related ill-health. It also provides the participatory physicians with free regular updates as well as responding to relevant queries from them about the cases which are reported. Its origins in THOR UK date back to 1989 while in the Republic of Ireland it started in 2005. This work is partly funded by the ROI Health and Safety Authority. It is encouraged by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland as well as by relevant Irish Specialist Societies. More information about THOR generally is available from:-

<http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/coeh/thor/>

This report briefly covers cases of occupational disease reported to Irish EPIDERM (skin), Irish SWORD (respiratory) received 2005-2007, and OPRA Ireland (all work-related diagnoses) received 2007.

LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

At the beginning of 2005, 14 consultant dermatologists and 12 consultant respiratory physicians in the Irish Republic agreed to participate in THOR. At the onset of Irish OPRA, 18 occupational physicians agreed to participate.

CASES REPORTED

IRISH EPIDERM:

EPIDERM received 181 case reports producing 179 diagnoses. Of these 181 case reports, 86/181 (47.5%) were males, with a mean age of 38.5 years (range 15-75), while the 95/181 (52.5%) females had a mean age of 35.9 years (range 18-65).

The major diagnostic sub-groups in EPIDERM are shown in Figure 1, with nearly all the diagnoses (176/179, 98%) being contact dermatitis (CD). The most frequently reported suspected agents for CD cases were nickel and compounds, wetwork, and rubber chemicals and materials.

The most frequently reported industrial sectors in EPIDERM were hospital activities which contributed 33/181 (18.2%) cases, and construction (32/181; 17.7% cases). Of note, other service activities (SIC 93) include washing and dry cleaning of textile and fur products, hairdressing and other beauty treatment, funeral and related services, and physical well-being activities.

Analysis of case reports by occupation shows that most jobs (67/181, 37.0%) were classified as "skilled trades"; this group would include construction workers, chefs, and electricians.

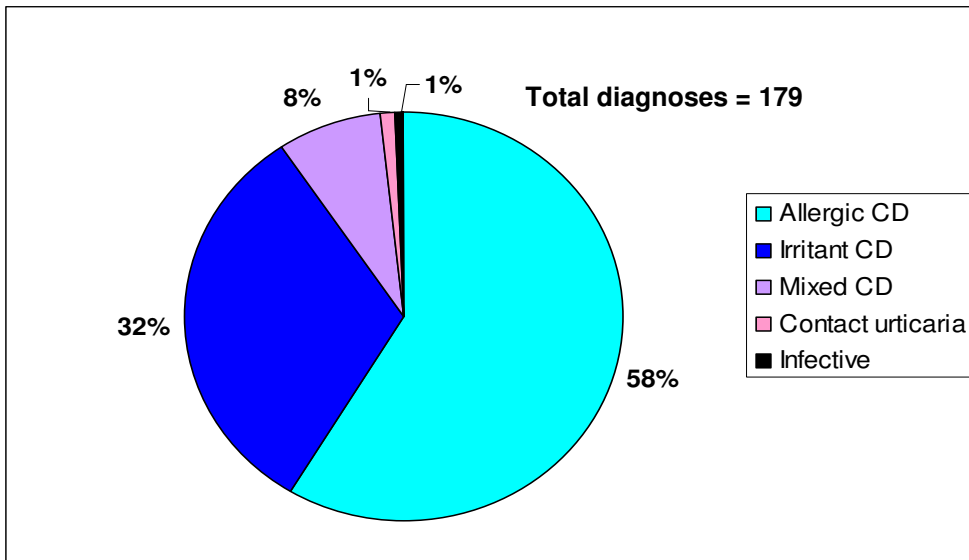


Figure 1 Disease categories reported by dermatologists in the Irish Republic to EPIDERM (2005-2007)

IRISH SWORD:

SWORD received a total of 35 case reports which produced 35 diagnoses, with 1 case assigned 2 diagnoses, and 1 case not being assigned a diagnosis (involving a dentist exposed to adhesive/bonding agents). For the cases reported to SWORD, the majority (29/35, 82.9%) were in males and their mean age was 52.9 (range 30-83) years. The 6 females (18.8%) reported to SWORD were younger, with a mean age of 41.2 years (range 19-64).

The major diagnostic sub-group in SWORD was occupational asthma (18/35 diagnoses, 51.4%) as shown in Figure 2. Most of these occupational asthma diagnoses were reported as sensitisation (15/18 diagnoses), but there were 3 diagnoses reported as caused by irritation (reactive airways dysfunction syndrome [RADS]).

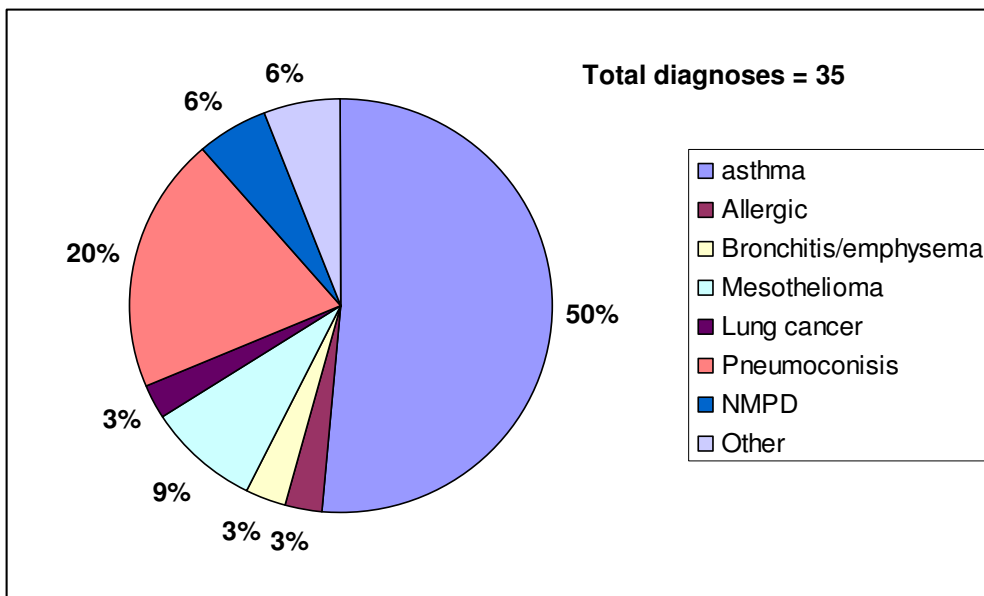


Figure 2 Disease categories reported by chest physicians in the Irish Republic to SWORD (2005-2007)

The most frequently reported sensitising agents associated with the 18 diagnoses of occupational asthma was 16; 3/16 (18.8%) were hairdressing chemicals, 3/16 (18.8%) were printing chemicals, and the agents listed below were each cited on 1 occasion:

- glues/adhesives
- cobalt
- drugs/medicaments
- wood/wood dust
- flour
- plant material (pollen)
- isocyanates
- epoxy resins
- chromium

OPRA IRELAND:

Occupational physicians began reporting to ROI OPRA at the start of 2007, in that 12 month period, 82 case reports (producing 87 diagnoses) have been reported. The majority of the cases reported to OPRA were females (64/82, 78.0%) with a mean age of 40.7 (range 19-61) years. The male cases (18/82, 22.0%) were slightly older with a mean age of 43.7 (range 29-61) years.

As indicated in Figure 3, the majority of diagnoses reported to OPRA were mental ill-health diagnoses (40/87, 46.0%) and musculoskeletal (35/87, 40.2%) with a smaller proportion of skin (8/87, 9.2%) and respiratory cases (4/87, 4.6%). Of the mental ill-health cases 20 had a diagnoses of stress, 8 of anxiety/depression, and 5 had a co-diagnosis of both anxiety/depression and stress. The majority (20/35) of the musculoskeletal cases were back/thoracic spine disorders with the remaining cases upper limb disorders. All of the 8 skin cases were contact dermatitis (7 irritant and 1 suspected allergic) whilst the respiratory cases comprised of 2 cases of asthma, 1 case of bronchitis and 1 case of rhinitis.

For mental ill-health, the most frequently associated precipitating events (23/48, 47.9%) was 'factors intrinsic to the job' which included 'workload', 'travel', and 'organisational factors'. This was followed by 'interpersonal relationships' (15/48, 31.2%) which included 8 cases of perceived bullying. The remaining precipitating events were 'changes at work' (5/48, 10.4%).

For musculoskeletal cases the most frequently associated task was 'lifting/carrying/pushing/pulling' (12/36, 33.3%) followed by 'materials manipulation' (11/36, 30.6%) and 'keyboard work' (7/36, 19.4%). The most frequently associated movement was 'materials handling' (22/39, 56.4%) followed by 'postural' (6/39, 15.4%).

The suspected agents associated with the 8 skin cases were; wetwork, cleansing agents, glove use, dishwashing detergents, chlohexidine and hand detergents whilst the suspected agents associated with the four respiratory cases were; chlorine disinfectant, wood dust, chlorine dioxide and 'sanitizer fumes'.

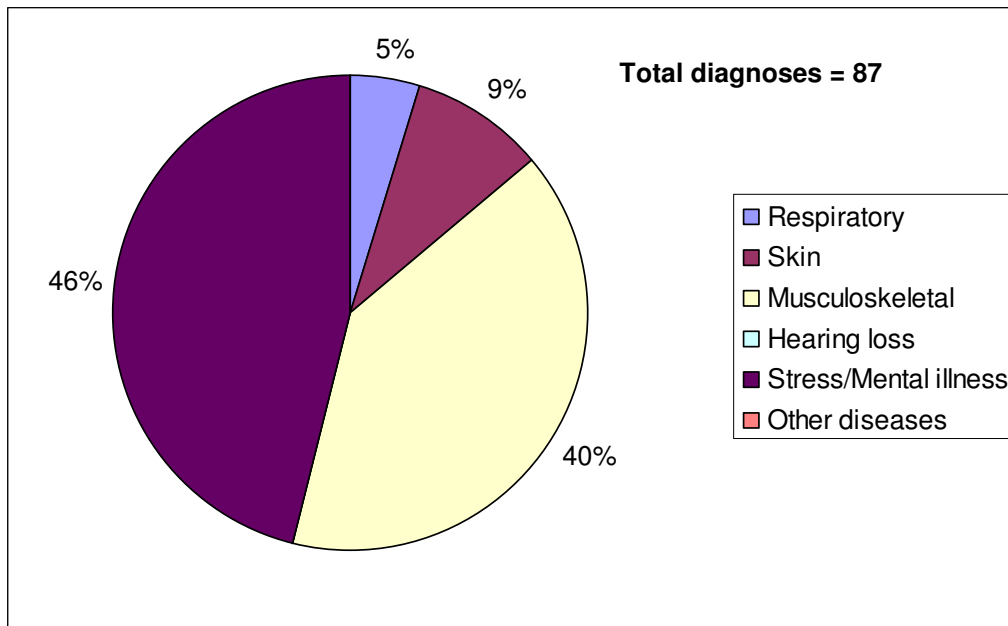


Figure 3 Disease categories reported by occupational physicians in the Irish Republic to OPRA (2007)

The majority of the cases reported to OPRA were in the health and social care sector. Cases reported in this sector were predominantly female (61/71, 85.9%) and had a mean age of 42 years (age range 19-61). A further 6 cases were reported in the land transport sector (5/6, 83.3% were anxiety diagnoses with 1 musculoskeletal diagnosis), 6 of which were reported in the transport industry.

The most frequently reported occupation was nurses (22/71, 31.0%) which falls within the SOC category 'associate professional and technical' 9). Other cases included 6 cases reported in clerical workers, 4 cases in pharmacy technicians and 3 cases in hospital consultants. Non-healthcare related occupations reported to OPRA included drivers (3 cases) secretaries (2 cases) and carpenters (1 case).

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

As the data for the Irish Republic schemes increases then it should be possible to compare data obtained from these schemes with data from THOR schemes in Northern Ireland (where 75 doctors report, including 9 dermatologists, 14 chest physicians, and 19 occupational physicians). Further comparisons could also be made between data from the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland and the rest of the British Isles, to provide invaluable information to assist the production of incidence estimates for occupationally related ill-health in the European Union (EU).

In due course we plan to prepare a paper on occupational disease and work-related ill-health in the whole of Ireland so as to inform physicians, policy makers and others.

If you are a chest physician, a dermatologist or an occupational physician and wish to join then please feel free to contact one of your speciality colleagues to find out more: Dr Hayes email: james.hayes@maile.hse.ie; Dr Burke email: johnfbourke@iol.ie; or Dr Noone email: noonep@doctors.org.uk, respectively. You would not only contribute to their endeavour to help improve health at work in the Republic of Ireland, but will be able to benefit from participation through access to information. If you have other queries please contact us (see table 1 for details).

Table 1. THOR Contact details

SCHEME	email	phone
ROI EPIDERM	catherine.roberts@manchester.ac.uk	+44 (0) 161 275 7103
ROI SWORD	catherine.roberts@manchester.ac.uk	+44 (0) 161 275 7103
ROI OPRA	rachel.robinson-2@manchester.ac.uk	+44 (0) 161 275 5284
DATA REQUESTS	annemarie.money@manchester.ac.uk	+44 (0) 161 275 8491
GENERAL ENQUIRIES	annemarie.money@manchester.ac.uk	+44 (0) 161 275 8491