

*KT Palmer et al. Occup. Med. Sep (2001) Vol.51(6) p 392.*

Studies of potential associations between keyboard use and upper limb discomfort have tended to be confined to an occupational setting. A general survey of the working age population would put this into context.

A questionnaire was mailed to 21 201 subjects aged 16-64 years, selected at random from the registers of 34 British general practices.

Information was collected on occupation and on regular use of keyboards (for >4 h in an average day), pain in the upper limbs and neck, numbness or tingling in the upper limbs, headaches, and feelings of tiredness or stress.

Pain in the neck or upper limbs and sensory symptoms were common in the non-manual workers overall (with 1 week period prevalences of 30% and 15%, respectively), and were associated with older age, smoking, headaches and tiredness or stress.

After adjustment for these factors, regular keyboard use was significantly (but weakly) associated with pain in the past week in the shoulders (PRs 1.2-1.4) and the wrists or hands (PR 1.4), but not with elbow pain or sensory symptoms over the same period, or with neck or upper limb pain that prevented normal activities in the past year.

Disabling symptoms were somewhat less prevalent among symptomatic keyboard users than among other symptomatic workers.

#### Comment

It would seem that extensive use of keyboards was associated with discomfort at the shoulder and wrist or hand, but risk estimates were lower than generally reported in workplace surveys.

Previous estimates of risk in the occupational setting may have been biased by shared expectations, concerns, or other aspects of illness behaviour.

Discomfort is of an unknown relationship with actual or subsequent injury.

