

Welcome to this second issue of the BackCare Research Newsletter. Many thanks for your responses to the first issue and please continue to send in your items for future issues to ResearchNewsletter@backcare.org.uk. The current issue has a range of items on the latest research and development in the field of back pain. I hope you not only enjoy reading it but also find it interesting and useful.

Audit Tool for ARMA Standards of Care for People with Back Pain

The Standards of Care for people with back pain were published by the Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance some time ago. They are now in the process of compiling an audit tool for patients and professionals, which they aim to publish in May. See: www.arma.uk.net

Surgery or Non-operative Treatment for Disc Herniation?

Weinstein and colleagues published the first results of the SPORT trial (Spine Patient Outcomes Research Trial) that compared the effectiveness of surgical treatment with non-operative treatment for symptomatic lumbar disc herniation. The authors aimed for a proper randomised trial but the patients in this trial decided differently. Extensive cross-over between the two treatments made a solid comparison in effectiveness impossible. However the unexpected findings of this large trial are perhaps of even more importance: patients who made well-informed decisions based on values, expectations and life situations of the individual patients had favourable outcomes with either treatment option. See the report on this RCT in [JAMA](http://jama.ama-assn.org) [2006;296:2441-50](http://jama.ama-assn.org).

The Importance of Randomization in Clinical Trials

The authors of the SPORT trial (as discussed above) also conducted an observational study on those who did not want to participate in the RCT. Patients in this group who underwent surgery had more improvement than those who received non-surgical treatment. However the authors commented, quite rightly, that the lack of randomization means that it cannot be concluded that surgery is the better option. It more implies that (similar to the conclusions from the RCT) making well-informed decision on what treatment to follow is crucial. Read the full observational study in [JAMA](http://jama.ama-assn.org) [2006;296:2451-9](http://jama.ama-assn.org).

The BackLetter

Are you familiar with the BackLetter? This American monthly publication gives in-depth information on the latest research on the diagnosis and treatment of back problems. It is a lot more expensive than the BackCare Research Newsletter but some of you might be interested in the more in-depth articles in the BackLetter, see their [website](#) for more information.

Sitting and Back Pain

In November a number of national newspapers (including some broadsheets) reported on a study that supposedly said that we all should slouch in our chair to prevent back pain. The original study was by Dr Bashir et al. at the University of Aberdeen and the University of Alberta. They conducted MRI scans of 22 healthy volunteers during sitting in various positions and concluded that the intradiscal pressure is less when leaning back in approximately a 120-degree angle. A very interesting study that makes good use of the positional MRI device that was available to them, however the conclusion that slouching prevents back pain was primarily drawn by the journalists and not by the researchers. So I am still sitting upright.

Work & Health

I am sure that at some stage we have all experienced work-related stress or even illness, but in general work is good for your health. The latter is the conclusion from an extensive review of the literature by Professors Waddell and Burton. Traditionally work has often been associated with risk factors, but it is now time for a change in culture and use work to sustain and achieve good health and well-being. There is now a leaflet available for employers and other involved in work & health issues, which gives practical information on how to use this new thinking in practice. This leaflet can be downloaded from the [BackCare website](#). The full evidence report is available from [The Stationary Office](#).

BackCare Medal

At the 2006 annual meeting of the Society for Back Pain Research Dr Ruth Johnson, Prof Gary Macfarlane and co-workers were awarded with the 2006 BackCare Medal. This award for the best research paper presented at the SBPR meeting went to their report on 'A biopsychosocial intervention for persistent low back pain: effectiveness and patient preferences'. See [press release](#) for more info.

Opioids for Back Pain

The January issue of Annals of Internal Medicine contains a systematic review on the use of opioids for chronic back pain. The authors concluded that opioids are commonly prescribed for chronic back pain and may be effective for short-term pain relief. The long-term (>16 weeks) effectiveness is unclear. The worrying bit though is that substance use disorders are common in this group (lifetime prevalence 36%-56%). See [Ann Intern Med 2007;146:116-127](#).

Wanted: Presenters

Regularly BackCare is approached with the question to supply speakers for corporate events or other meetings to speak about back care and back pain. We now aim to train presenters and set up a database of speakers that can deliver these presentation on behalf of BackCare. For more information on how to become a BackCare speaker please email Dries@backcare.org.uk.

Choice or Standard Care?

Although not part of the standard package of care in most settings, complementary therapies are often a preferred treatment for a number of patients with back pain. But do they fare better over time than those allocated to standard care? That was the question in a large RCT from Eisenberg et al. in the USA. They concluded that after 5 weeks there were no clinically significant differences in improvement between the two groups, but (perhaps not surprisingly) the 'choice' group reported higher satisfaction with treatment than those allocated to 'standard care'. Although the medical costs in the 'choice' group were lower than for 'standard care', the patients in the 'choice' group had to cough up \$343 in costs for the complementary therapies, which was not covered by the insurer. Read the full report in [Spine 2007;32\(2\):151-8](#).

Research-TV

In the competition for research funding, communicating and promoting your research has become more and more important. Research-TV is a company based at the University of Warwick that offers a video news release service. They can make video clips about your research project(s) and distribute them to worldwide broadcasters. See www.research-tv.com

James Lind Alliance

There is no doubt that we now know much more about health and disease than a few decades ago. Nevertheless patients and clinicians still have a large number of questions that need further investigation by researchers. The James Lind Alliance aims to assist in getting these questions on the research agenda and identify Uncertainties about the Effects of Treatments (DUETs). See for more information www.lindalliance.org

BackCare Research Funding

At their last meeting, BackCare's Research Committee awarded funding to the following project:

- Pincus, T. Reliability and validity of the SCID interview for depression for the use with chronic back pain patients. (£4794).

Back Pain Conferences and Events

- 13th Moving & Handling People Conference. 1-2 February 2007, London. <http://www.movingandhandlingpeople.co.uk/homepage.asp>
- Institution for Occupational Safety and Health Conference. 27-28 March 2007. Telford. <http://www.ioshconference.co.uk/2007/default.asp?page=intro>
- 34rd International Society for the Study of the Lumbar Spine. 10-14 June 2007. Hong Kong. <http://issls.org/>
- Society for Back Pain Research / Finnish Back Society meeting, 28-29 June 2007, Helsinki, Finland. See www.sbpr.org
- 6th Interdisciplinary World Congress on Low Back Pain & Pelvic Pain. 7-10 November 2007, Barcelona, Spain. www.worldcongresslbp.com

Please email events and conference you would like to advertise to your colleagues across the UK to ResearchNewsletter@backcare.org.uk.