

Preface

The articles in this issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* deal with the problem of occupational disorders of the neck, shoulders and upper limbs. The communications are very heterogeneous. As the review articles show, the terminology is clear only for some types of diseases. Consequently neither the definitions nor the diagnoses have been crystallized.

As an occupational problem these disorders are however important — both in terms of compensation/human costs and absenteeism/production disturbances. In Finland compensated injuries due to unaccustomed repetitive movements comprised 881 of the total 2,472 cases of compensation caused by physical agents in 1978, and this group ranks second as a cause of compensated occupational diseases. It is quite evident also that the number of compensated cases underestimates the problem.

This special issue of the *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* contains articles which highlight different aspects of neck and upper limb disorders with an occupational origin. The three first articles are reviews of the three main anatomic areas: the neck and shoulders, the elbow, and the wrist. The fourth article presents an epidemiologic clinical method for investigation. This review on

clinical criteria is based on recent literature but avoids overlapping the review articles preceding it. The fifth and sixth articles present the results of the application of the method. In the former article the role of work load factors is presented, and in the latter the occurrence of neck and upper limb diseases in two working populations are analyzed. The epidemiologic and work load studies reveal some of the features of these disorders.

Intensive experimental research is needed to clarify the biological and biomechanical factors involved in the process of the disorders. The last paper in this collection illustrates this approach.

In this issue we have not touched medical prevention, diagnosis or the treatment of neck, shoulder and upper limb disorders. Instead our aim has been to discover the occupational component involved in these disorders, which are not uncommon outside the workshop either. Since prevention in an industrial setting seems to be more easily organized, it motivates the focusing of attention on occupational problems. For efficient prevention, more-detailed information on the relationships between work load in repetitive tasks and the disorders is needed, and future research should be directed towards that goal.

Ilkka Kuorinka