

## SOCIAL PARTNERS' CONFERENCE ON APPROACHES TO THE ISSUE OF MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS

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Paris conference – 25 March 2015

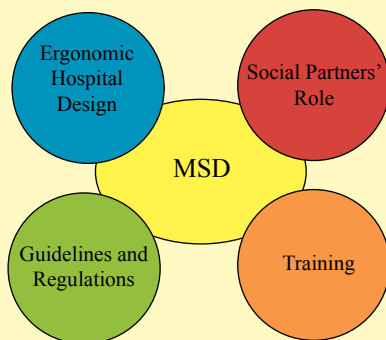
## ***First conference – 25 March 2015***

As part of their EU project aiming to assess health and safety risks in the hospital sector, the European sectoral social partners' organisations HOSPEEM and EPSU held a first conference on approaches to the issue of musculoskeletal disorders in Paris on 25 March 2015. The conference was co-organised by FEHAP, the French HOSPEEM member.



The event brought together around 90 participants from 16 EU Member States, mainly from national trade unions' and employers' organisations. It was also attended by representatives from the European Commission and Eurofound and by experts in the field of occupational safety and health.

### **Approaches to the issue of musculoskeletal disorders:**



### **MSDs in some figures:**

- Work-related musculoskeletal disorders (WRMSDs) represent today more than 60% of all work-related health problems
- WRMSDs account for 60% of all sickness absences in the EU and also for about 60% of all cases of permanent incapacity to work
- At least 11 million workers are affected, i.e. 5% of the total EU working population
- Total cost of WRMSDs across the EU can be estimated at over EUR 163 billion

*\*Source: European Commission, figures are not specific to the healthcare sector*

### ***MSDs : a major OSH issue in the hospital sector***

This first conference aimed to provide participants with a common understanding of the phenomenon of musculoskeletal disorders in the hospital sector and an overall picture of the concrete measures social partners could take to prevent and manage them.

Musculoskeletal disorders indeed constitute a major OSH problem in the hospital sector, being the main cause of sickness absence. Health workers, especially nurses, are particularly exposed to MSDs. Moreover, women, being overrepresented in this sector, are more significantly affected than men.

## *Conference highlights*

This one-day conference was moderated by Tjitte Alkema, Secretary General of HOSPEEM, and structured along 4 cornerstones: regulations and guidelines, social partners' role, ergonomic hospital design and training of health workers.

To start with and set the scene, some background information was provided on the size and nature of the phenomenon of musculoskeletal disorders and on the main risk factors in the hospital sector.

The standard ISO/TR 12296 (2012) on Manual handling of people in the health care sector referred to by Nico Knibbe (the project external expert) in his presentation was stressed as a key instrument in preventing and managing MSDs and thus as an efficient tool to improve health workers' working conditions.

Moreover, the crucial role social partners can play in tackling musculoskeletal disorders at the workplace was particularly underlined. The need for their full commitment and collaboration was highlighted as key ingredients to a successful prevention and management of MSDs, as illustrated by the "Back Pack" guidance presented by Kim Sunley (Royal College of Nursing) and James Tracey (NHS).



In his presentation, Tom Guthknecht, architect and president of the Lausanne Health and Hospitality Group, put the emphasis on cost-effectiveness of ergonomic hospital design. He indeed explained how the introduction of ergonomic concepts in hospitals, to improve working conditions and achieve higher work efficiency, could significantly reduce operational costs of hospitals.

Hélène Antonini-Castera presented an innovative project launched by the Institut Robert Merle d'Aubigné to prevent musculoskeletal disorders at the workplace through the introduction of internal preventers.

In a concluding session, Maryvonne Nicolle (CFDT Fédération Santé et Services Sociaux) and Marta Branca (ARAN) summarized the discussions of the day.

In addition, the interactive lunch break gave participants the opportunity to exchange views and share knowledge and good practices on how to prevent and manage MSDs and achieve healthier and safer working conditions in the hospital sector.

## *The importance of risk assessment*

This first conference contributed to create an interest for the issue of musculoskeletal disorders, increase knowledge of the risks and raise awareness on the importance of risk assessment and prevention within hospitals.



## *Good practices, ressources and materials*

The different speakers showed in very practical terms what can be done to address this occupational hazard in the hospital sector and demonstrated the importance of joining forces and sharing good practices and experiences as “one size fits all solutions” don’t exist. Social dialogue was underscored as an adequate instrument to advance on this issue.

All the presentations are available on the dedicated [HOSPEEM webpage](#) and [EPSU webpage](#). You can also find relevant material collected on musculoskeletal disorders [here](#).



## *Acknowledgements*

HOSPEEM would like to thank its affiliated member [FEHAP](#) and the project partner [EPSU](#) for their support.

HOSPEEM also thanks the European Commission for its financial support of the project.