

## Scope of CTDs at Social Security Administration revealed

In a workplace survey of Social Security Administration employees, almost one-third of the respondents reported seeking treatment for computer-related symptoms while 40 percent of the respondents experienced hand/wrist pain at the end of each workday.

The survey, conducted by Rani Lueder of Humanics ErgoSystems Inc. for the Joint Committee for Implementation and Design Committee of the Social Security Administration. Data was collected between July and October 1996 from SSA offices around the country. Its objective was to determine the extent of workplace discomfort, the relationship between discomfort and workplace factors and respondents attitudes about their workplace and working conditions.

### Neck/shoulder discomfort most common

The most common source of discomfort from the more than 13,000 respondents was neck/shoulders, followed by eyes, low back, hands, upper back, head and elbows. (See the chart below of exact percentages.)

Among these respondents, 2,145 (16 percent) reported that they were in extreme pain in one or more body parts (except the eyes) at the end of their workday.

Lueder observes in the survey, "Of particular note, the prevalence of neck/shoulder and hand discomfort is considerably higher than is common with such surveys."

Among women respondents, SSA service representa-

tives sought treatment for work-related symptoms the most often (37 percent) followed by claims representatives (37 percent), technical assistants (32 percent), "other" (31 percent), and claims development clerks (30 percent). Nineteen percent of supervisors sought treatment.

According to the survey, employees performing front-end interviewing (shared workstations) were consistently more uncomfortable in all body parts except for the hands.

Among psychosocial factors, almost 30 percent would not tell their supervisors they were experiencing strong or regular discomfort. Forty-two percent of those reporting severe pain did not receive assistance after seeking it from their supervisor.

Other findings include:

- A strong and consistent relationship between discomfort and not taking rest breaks.
- Sixty-one percent were aware of glare on the VDT screen.
- Females experienced considerably more discomfort than males.
- 70 percent indicated they received ergonomics training.

Specific recommendations were developed as a result of the survey, but not included in the final report. However, Lueder wrote in her report, "It is essential that SSA develop a concerted, focused and comprehensive program to address the broad spectrum of hazards that contribute to risk of CTDs."

Howard Eggerman, regional health and safety representative for the AFL-CIO at the SSA's Oakland facility, noted the recommendations from the survey have not been embraced. "This is the first survey of the SSA. We got the survey done because of arbitration and it said things they (SSA management) wanted to hear."

• For more on the study, contact the AFL-CIO's Howard Eggerman at (510) 273-6009. ♦

