

Preface: Neck Pain and the Decade of the Bone and Joint 2000–2010

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There are periods in history when a neglected health concern which is seriously impacting the economic viability of society and draining health resources must become the focus of increased attention. At the end of the 1990s, it became obvious that renewed focus was needed in the area of musculoskeletal disorders:

- There was evidence that joint diseases accounted for half of all chronic health problems among those aged 65 and over.
- Repeated epidemiological studies documented that spinal pain had become the second leading reason for workers taking sick leave.
- The rate of fractures related to osteoporosis had almost doubled compared to rates in the previous decade.
- Health experts were predicting that 4 out of 10 women over age 50 would suffer from osteoporotic fractures at least once in their lifetime.

Indeed, bone and joint disorders were becoming the most notorious and common cause of severe long-term pain and physical disability, affecting hundreds of millions of people around the world.

At the same time, severe injuries caused by traffic accidents and war were producing a tremendous demand for preventive and restorative help. It was anticipated that, by the year 2010, one quarter of all health expenditures in developing nations would go towards providing trauma-related care. A significant portion of this care involved treating people with whiplash injuries affecting the cervical spine.

It was also becoming evident that neck pain and its associated disorders—including headache and pain radiating into the upper back and arms—were much more common than anyone had previously believed. Indeed, neck-related pain has become a major cause of disability around the world:

- In North America, about 5% of the general population is disabled because of neck pain.
- In any given 6-month period, another 10% of North Americans report experiencing low-level disability along with high-intensity neck pain.

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- In Europe, surveys show that chronic or persistent neck pain affects between 10% and 20% of the population.
- Studies in other countries confirm that these statistics are not limited to people living in industrialized nations.

On January 13, 2000, in an effort to focus global attention on disorders of the musculoskeletal system, the World Health Organization formally launched the Bone and Joint Decade at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland. The initiative had already received endorsement from the United Nations the previous year.

The goal of the Bone and Joint Decade is “to improve the health-related quality of life for people with musculoskeletal disorders throughout the world.” This would be achieved in several ways: by raising awareness of the growing social and economic burden of musculoskeletal disorders, by empowering patients to participate in their own care, by promoting cost-effective prevention and treatment, and by advancing our understanding of musculoskeletal disorders through research to improve prevention and treatment.

As the Bone and Joint Decade was in its final planning stages, proposals were being considered to fund an international Task Force on Neck Pain and Its Associated Disorders. The goals of the Task Force were:

- to complete a systematic search and critical review of the scientific literature on neck pain and its associated disorders, including the epidemiology, diagnosis, prognosis, economic costs, and treatment of neck pain and its associated disorders
- to complete original research on the risks associated with the treatment of neck pain
- to examine cost-effectiveness and patient preferences for various treatment options
- to collate the evidence, using best evidence synthesis, inform clinical practice for the management of neck pain and its associated disorders
- to indicate areas where further research should be required.

On March 15, 2002, after reviewing proposals for the Neck Pain Task Force, the Steering Committee of the Bone and Joint Decade gave permission for the Task Force to use the name and logo of the Bone and Joint Decade in its title.

Over the past 6 years, members of the Neck Pain Task Force have been working diligently towards accomplishing their stated goals. During this time, their progress has been monitored by the Steering Committee of the umbrella organization.

The hope is that, armed with a deeper understanding of neck pain and its associated disorders, clinicians will be better able to diagnose and treat people affected by these distressing and often disabling symptoms. The work of the Neck Pain Task Force may also encourage appropriate policy changes to improve the health and well-being of patients. Finally, it is expected that the Neck Pain Task Force report will help

illuminate the need for more targeted research in the area of neck pain.

The Members of the Bone and Joint Decade, along with its many affiliated organizations, have eagerly awaited the results of this initiative. These findings represent a significant contribution to a vast array of new knowledge generated by scientists and others associated with the Bone and Joint Decade project.