

Newsletter March 2021

Welcome to the first THOR newsletter of 2021. The start of 2021 was very difficult due to the resurgence of the number of COVID-19 cases, leading to an extensive nationwide lockdown. With the easing of lockdown and the successful roll out of the vaccination programme, we can possibly be a bit more optimistic for the rest of the year (although we are not out of the woods yet!).

THOR reporting is gradually picking up again, following a dip in reporting at the start of the pandemic. I hope that this will continue. We are also picking up some COVID-19 cases, but only a handful. Clearly, it is very difficult to establish if a patient was infected in the workplace. However, we are keen to receive COVID-19 case reports if work was likely to have played a role.

We are currently in negotiations with the Health and Safety Executive for a new contract for THOR, which will secure funding for data collection for the next 3 years. As part of this new contract, we will continue to introduce innovations so that reporting will be even easier and to improve the benefits from participating (e.g. seminar series and other CPD opportunities, access to data, opportunities to participate in research, etc). We are keen to have your input into the development of our plans. As soon as we have agreed the contract, we will provide you with further information.



In this newsletter	Page
Summary statistics this quarter	2-3
Interesting cases of the quarter	3
Events	4
Recent publications	4
Data request service	4
Contacts	4

Summary statistics this quarter

Physicians reported 112 cases (138 diagnoses) of work-related ill-health to THOR between 1st October and 31st December 2020 (Table 1). Occupational physicians reported 41%, dermatologists reported 21%, chest physicians reported 24% and general practitioners reported 14% of the total number of cases.

Table 1: Number of cases and diagnoses reported to THOR between October and December 2020

Scheme	Cases	Diagnoses
OPRA	46	51
EPIDERM	23	27
SWORD	27	43
THOR-GP*	16	18
Total	112	138

*THOR-GP physicians report actual cases only

The mean age of the cases reported to THOR was 45 years old (age range for all cases was 19-83 years). Figure 1 shows the proportion of cases reported by age group to THOR. Cases reported to THOR were 53% in females and 47% in males.

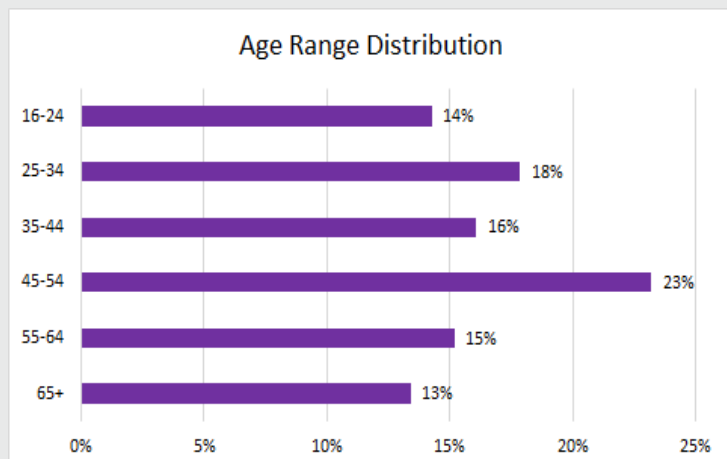
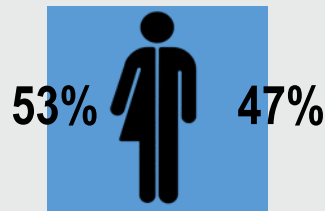
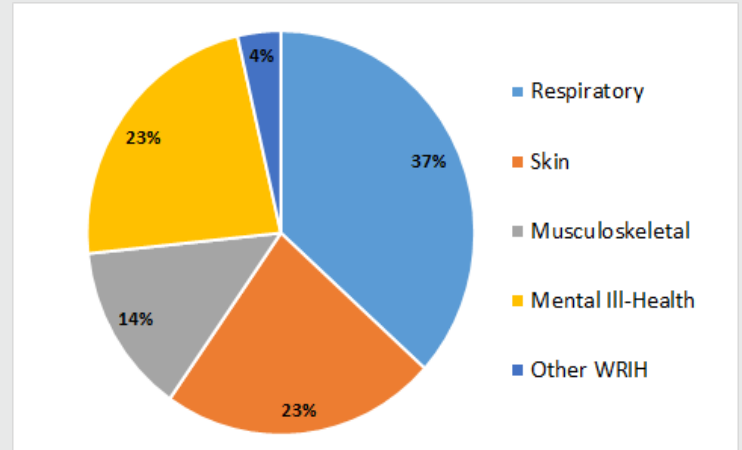


Figure 1: Percentage of cases by age group reported to THOR between October and December 2020

The majority of diagnoses reported to THOR this quarter were respiratory diseases (37%), 23% were mental ill-health, 23% were skin diseases, 14% were musculoskeletal disorders, and 4% were other work-related ill-health conditions (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Proportion of diagnoses by disease category reported to THOR this quarter. *WRIH* : Work related ill-health.



35% of all respiratory diseases were related to **non-malignant pleural disease**



94% of all skin diseases were related to **contact dermatitis**



27% of all musculoskeletal diseases were related to the **back/lumber spine**



39% of all mental ill-health diseases were related to **work related stress**

Summary statistics this quarter-continued

The most frequently reported sector for this quarter was health and social care (42%). Followed by public administration and defence (16%), manufacturing (12%), construction (12%), and education (4%). Other industries (with 3 or less cases) made up 14% of the cases reported this quarter (Figure 3).

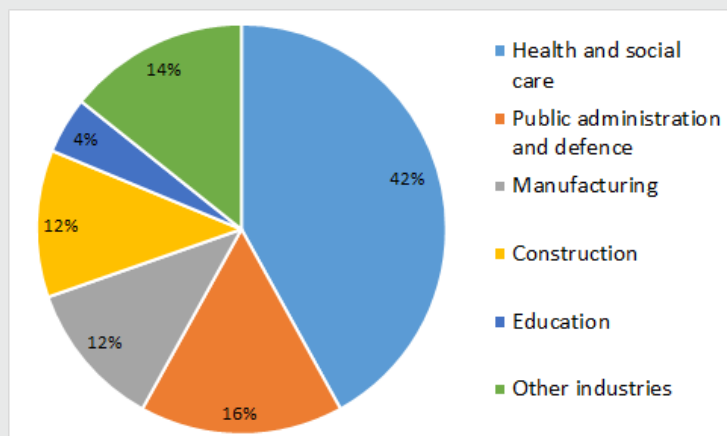


Figure 3: Proportion of industries reported to THOR between October and December 2020.

The most frequently reported occupation to THOR this quarter was nurses (15%). Following this were non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and other ranks at 8% and nursing auxiliaries and assistants at 6% (see below for further details).

Most frequently reported occupations:

15% Nurses

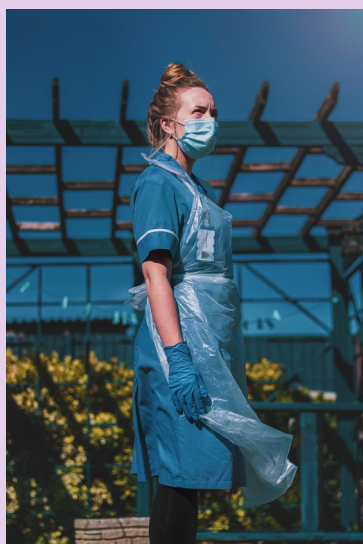
8% NCOs and other ranks

6% Nursing auxiliaries and assistants

4% Carpenters and joiners

4% Medical practitioners

3% Teachers



Interesting Cases of the Quarter

Martin Seed

(Consultant and Honorary Senior Lecturer in Occupational Medicine at UK NHS & The University of Manchester)



The 'Hands, Face, Space' public health mantra was reinforced by the government as the second wave of the UK COVID-19 epidemic started to take off between October and December 2020. THOR reporter activity was inevitably lower than usual due to COVID related pressures on physicians, but the EPIDERM reports for the quarter make for interesting analysis with 21 of 27 (78%) cases being within the health and social care sector.

There were 18 cases of hand dermatosis reported in health and social care for which the diagnosis in 13 cases was irritant contact dermatitis, hand hygiene measures being the attributed cause in 12. In the recently updated EPIDERM source coding there is a clearer category 'hand hygiene' to include soaps, detergents and disinfecting agents in addition to wet-work. The 'PPE' category is also divided into gloves and other body part protection. There were two cases affecting the face in this quarter: irritant dermatitis attributed to wearing a face mask in a hospital nurse; allergic contact dermatitis attributed to the green/blue anti fog foam nose strip within the type IIR face mask in another nurse/support worker.

Health and social care has gradually overtaken manufacturing as the sector most affected by contact dermatitis since the turn of the millennium [1]. The overwhelming predominance of cases in health and social care staff described this quarter is likely to reflect, at least in part, the pandemic situation. Workers who cannot maintain Space have significant dermatological risks to Hands and Face.

[1] Meyer, JD; Chen, Y; Holt, DL; et al. Occupational contact dermatitis in the UK: a surveillance report from EPIDERM and OPRA. Occupational Medicine 2000;50:265-273.

Events

Seminar Series

The latest lecture in our seminar series “**A spectrum of lung diseases seen in welders and metal workers**” was presented by Dr Jennifer Hoyle, who is a longstanding SWORD reporter. Jennie’s seminar used a case study to explore occupational diseases in metal workers and welders. The seminar was interactive, including a quiz for the audience and was very well received, thank you Jennie!

All previous seminars are available to watch on the THOR reporting website [here](#).

Our upcoming seminars include:

- Wednesday 28th April, 10am. **Working in hot environments**, presented by Ross Di Corleto
- Tuesday 11th May, 4pm. **Expatriate workers**, presented by Andrew Benc
- Monday 24th May, 4pm. **Working in the cold**, presented by Rory O'Connor

Emails will be sent out closer to the time with information on how to register.

Recent Publications to THOR

Mason, Howard J; Carder, Melanie; Money, Annemarie; Evans, Gareth; Seed, Martin; Agius, Raymond; van Tongeren, Martie, **Occupation asthma and its causation in the UK seafood processing industry**, Annals of Work Exposures and Health 2020; in press. doi: 10.1093/annweh/wxaa055

Data Request Service

A reminder that we operate a data request service for our reporting physicians, funding bodies, members of the public, research institutions, and other interested parties. Below are just some of the requests we have answered to date in 2020

- Cases of Legionnaire’s disease/Legionella reported to THOR
- Cases of lab animal allergy reported to SWORD
- Overview of cases of interstitial lung disease and constrictive bronchitis
- Contact dermatitis cases attributed to nickel, cobalt, and chromium
- Cases of hand dermatitis attributed to glass isomer (ketac cement)
- Cases of work-related audiological disorders, and work related noise induced hearing loss
- The impact of COVID-19 on cases of mental-ill health reported to THOR

Contacts

We hope you enjoy this quarter’s newsletter. If you have any further questions about any of our schemes, then please get in touch via one of the contacts listed below. We are always happy to hear from you.

Scheme	Email
EPIDERM / SWORD	laura.byrne@manchester.ac.uk
OPRA / THOR-GP	susan.taylor@manchester.ac.uk
Data requests	ireny.iskandar@manchester.ac.uk
General enquires	ireny.iskandar@manchester.ac.uk sarah.daniels@manchester.ac.uk

