

0111

Does a Functional Evaluation Affect the Medical Assessment of Disability in Whiplash Injury

Navah Ratzon, Shiri Zmir, Sharon Friedman, Batia Marom, Tamara Shechter-Margalit
Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel

Introduction: Whiplash is the most common road traffic injury and responsible for long-term disability. Functional Capacity Evaluation (FCE) which attempts to predict the maximum safe capacity for work and daily tasks has been used in patients with musculoskeletal disorders, but its effect on physician's disability assessments has not been studied previously.

Objectives: This study examined the hypothesis that the addition of a function-based evaluation in addition to a medical-based examination will lower the degree of disability assessed by physicians given to patients after whiplash injury when compared to disability assessments on the basis of medical-based examinations alone.

Methods: Two orthopedic and two occupational medical specialists determined disability in 75 patients with whiplash injury. Files were given to specialists once with the Functional Capacity Evaluation (FCE) summary and once without the FCE summary. Disability percentage was calculated twice with the specialists blinded to the previous evaluation.

Results: In 32.9% of the files the specialists decreased disability percentages in files having a FCE summary in addition to basic and standard medical information. Physicians were more likely to decrease the assessed disability after reading the FCE in those who were determined to have self limited their efforts and in younger patients.

Conclusion: Including a FCE report results in medical disability evaluations in patients after whiplash injury may decrease assessed disability. Further studies are warranted to determine if these results can be extrapolated to other medical conditions and to other settings.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy: It is accepted that the combination of both medical-based examination and a function-based evaluation is needed to properly assess impairment, disability and ability status especially, in musculoskeletal disorders. The movement toward evidence-based practice in occupational therapy and other health professions calls on occupational therapists to find and use evidence as a basis for their practice. This presentation addresses the contribution of occupational therapy assessment to the medical disability specialist determinations in patients after whiplash injury.