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Workplace-based rehabilitation for upper limb conditions: A Systematic Review

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Introduction: Upper extremity conditions are amongst the most common and challenging health problems in the workplace, and the second most frequently treated diagnoses by South African work rehabilitation occupational therapists. There is a growing trend internationally to situate rehabilitation services at the workplace, while South African occupational therapy services tend to be centralised at hospitals and clinics.

Objectives: To determine the effectiveness of workplace-based rehabilitation in workers with upper limb conditions.

Method: We searched key databases for clinical trials with the following inclusion criteria: i) Participants 18 years or older who are actively employed, with a pre-existing upper extremity condition or upper limb pain; ii) Rehabilitation programs based at least partly at the workplace, including occupational health clinics. No date or language restrictions were applied. Studies were critically appraised using the Institute for Work and Health Risk of Bias tool.

Results: The number and type of included studies will be reported, as well as the characteristics of participants (age, gender, type of work, diagnosis), range of interventions used, and relevant outcomes.

Conclusion: A critical analysis will be provided on the range of rehabilitative interventions, strengths and limitations of the evidence, and the effectiveness of these interventions. Contrasts between research from developed and developing countries will be explored. The potential role of occupational therapy in the workplace will be discussed, along with implications for policy, practice and research.

This review was completed as part of a Masters degree in Occupational Therapy at Stellenbosch University. No funding was obtained. Prospero Registration CRD42017059708.