Submission to LegCo Members

Occupational Injuries to the Arms

In regard to the points raised by the Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre, the following information is provided for the reference of LegCo Members:-
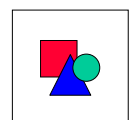
(a)   There are three types of occupational diseases involving strain injury to the hand:-

(1)   tenosynovitis of the hand or forearm (including the elbow);

(2)   cramp of the hand or forearm; and

(3)   carpal tunnel syndrome.

Tenosynovitis of the hand is a strain injury caused by repetitive or excessive movements. Inflammation develops as a result of friction between tendons and tendon sheaths. Generally speaking, workers who are required to make repetitive and quick movements, adopt an unnatural posture, exert physical strength suddenly or work in the same posture for extended time are prone to develop tenosynovitis. Typists, computer operators, assemblers, printing workers and press operators are some of the examples.

Cramp of the hand or forearm are caused by repetitive movements of the hand or forearm involving fine repetitive muscular activities such as writing, typing and knitting. These movements lead to cramps and pains.

Carpal tunnel syndrome is caused by repetitive use of hand-held power-driven vibrating tools such as pneumatic drills, chain saws and grinders. Pains, numbness and tingling sensation in the hand develop as a result of compression of the median nerve in the carpal tunnel at the wrist.

(b)   Tenosynovitis of the hand or forearm (including the elbow), cramp of the hand or forearm as well as carpal tunnel syndrome caused by occupational activities are already listed as occupational diseases prescribed for compensation purposes under the Employees'

Compensation Ordinance.   Under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, doctors are required to notify such diseases to the Commissioner for Labour.

(c)   During 1999, there were 54 cases of tenosynovitis of the hand.   Cramp of the hand or forearm and carpal tunnel syndrome were rare with none of the former and only one case of the latter found in 1999.

(d)   The Occupational Safety and Health Division of the Labour Department has made a lot of publicity efforts to raise awareness about strain injury, especially tenosynovitis.   Its Occupational Safety and Health Centre in Shum Shui Po has recently conducted seminars on tenosynovitis and strain injury to the hand for patient support groups.   It also holds regular exhibitions on the prevention and care of tenosynovitis.   To promote awareness among workers about tenosynovitis and other occupational diseases prescribed for compensation purposes, the Labour Department has produced a "Guide to Occupational Diseases Prescribed for Compensation Purposes" and several leaflets such as "Leaflet on Tenosynovitis" and "Leaflet on Strain Injury Suffered by Employees" for the reference of both employers and employees. Moreover, tenosynovitis of the hand will be a main theme in the publicity exercises to be launched in the coming year.   The Occupational Health Clinics of the Labour Department in Kwun Tong and Shum Shui Po provide treatment, prevention, rehabilitation and compensation services to worker ssuffering from occupational diseases such as tenosynovitis and strain injury.

The Government has drafted the Occupational Safety and Health (Display Screen Equipment) Regulation to better protect workers from tenosynovitis and strain injury.

Tenosynovitis of the shoulder as mentioned by the Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre is not an occupational disease prescribed for compensation purposes under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance.   It is because this disease is mainly due to degeneration with age.   It is not possible to determine from the disease itself whether occupation is the cause.   However, if a worker suffers injury and inflammation to his shoulder tendons and tendon sheaths because of accidental and excessive exertion of physical strength on a particular occasion, he is entitled to compensation on the ground of injury at work.

Education and Manpower Bureau
February 2000