Caution Advised in Using Predictors for At-Risk Workers

It is important that readers be aware that the results of my preliminary study cited, without critique, in the article “Health Promotion in the Office” by Virginia R. Allen, which appeared in the November, 1986, issue of the journal, must be verified on a larger sample (in process) before they can have any application to actual workers.

It is also important to note that the predictor variables are not necessarily "likely to cause a repetition injury" (p. 765). No causation can be attributed to measures of association. All we know is that four of the variables we measured, taken in combination, separated with 89% accuracy the 17 subjects whose upper limb injury was reported to OSHA from 21 comparable subjects without injury. These early results, along with others not reported, do provide a basis to continue the study. If the ability to predict at-risk workers can be well supported in replication studies, the role of the occupational therapist in industrial preventive hand therapy will be enhanced because it will be possible to offer education programs to targeted at-risk individuals—which is certainly more cost-effective for the company if not also more health-effective for the worker. However, I want to emphasize that therapists need to be cautious in the use of predictors for at-risk workers before there is a substantial body of research data to warrant such a use.

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