

AUSTRALASIAN FACULTY OF OCCUPATIONAL MEDICINE
HUNTER REGIONAL COMMITTEE
NOTICE OF AFOM TRAINEE MEETING

DATE: **Thursday, 18 March, 2004**

VENUE: NEWCASTLE HSA OFFICE
13 Darby Street, Newcastle. 2300

TIME: **4.30pm - 5.45pm**

CHAIR:
& Convenor Dr. Maurice Harden

SPEAKER: Dr. Deon VILJOEN

TOPIC: An employer asks you to see a 34 year old male employee who has worked as an operator for a local open cut mine for 10 years. The employee has been off work for 2 months following a shift at work where he drove over unusually rough ground in his 190 ton truck and subsequently experienced the onset of central low back pain. He previously had a period of low back pain 2 years earlier in similar circumstances but the pain settled without any loss of time at work. It is a common experience for the employees to report increased back pain after a jarring incident at work. It is also common for employees to be provided with medical certificates for time off work after a jarring incident. The employee recalls multiple episodes of jarring in association with large rocks being loaded into the back of the truck. The employee believes like many of his co-workers that 'whole body vibration' (WBV) is an occupational hazard for the spine and tells you that "...if you work in the industry long enough, your back will be stuffed too". He shows you an industry report indicating that the time limit before health problems occur as a result of WBV in a track dozer is 2 hours.

Q1 What would you advise this employee with regard to the risk of spine 'damage' as a result of exposure to WBV?

Q2 What would you advise his employer?

The employee commences a return to work program but after driving a light vehicle in the mine reports increased back pain and is provided with further certification for time off work. The employee is sent to the insurers doctor during this time and an MRI is arranged which detects no abnormality of the lumbar spine. The insurer's doctor provides a report with a diagnosis of non specific low back pain and advises the employee to stay away from jarring exposure for at least 6 months.

Q3 How would you manage this problem ?