

Dupuytren's Disease, Vibration and Employees' responsibilities.

In 2014 Dupuytren's was added to the list of 'Industrial Injuries Disablement benefit Diseases'. A report by the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council decided that the incidence of Dupuytren's disease was more than doubled in people who had had 'sufficient' exposure to hand held vibrating tools, compared to the general population.

This means that Dupuytren's Contracture (and only the contracture stage, as the early stages are not deemed to cause disability) was added to the list, and now the Government has to decide on any possible pay out for people who might qualify. To date no decision has been take.

Sufficient exposure means at least 10 years, 2 or more hours per day for 3 or more days per week. The work must have been with hand held power tools with internal vibrating parts.

This decision was based on a few epidemiological studies, showing a doubling of the risk of developing Dupuytren's in workers who had handled vibrating tools as described above. However there are other studies that did not show this link.

Generally speaking Dupuytren's Disease is considered a genetic condition, that can skip one or more generations. There is some suggestion that trauma, either a one off or repeated micro trauma, can increase the incidence, but it is unclear if this is only in people with a genetic predisposition or also in those that are not predisposed. There is no definitive genetic test, and multiple genes can be involved we suspect.

If there was a genetic test, the only way for an employer to safeguard employees would be to insist on testing before offering them a job. This is not only not feasible, but would be discriminatory.

People who play hockey and mountain climbers are also at higher risk of developing Dupuytren's. Would they need to be prevented from putting themselves at risk? Miners and road workers nor their employees knew of this risk even 10 years ago, so how can we say employees are to blame if they have followed H&S guidelines?

This is a very grey area, there are a lot of considerations.

The British Dupuytren's Society has decided NOT to take a stand on this. We do not back certain studies over others, we will not tell our members they should be avoiding doing their jobs or enjoying their hobbies. We will advise them to wear padded gloves and protect their hands where possible.