DEVELOPMENT OF A WARNING SYSTEM FOR CARPAL TUNNEL SYNDROME

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In recent years, the reports of carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) cases have grown dramatically in the U.S. Numerous methods of prevention have been recommended, e.g., workstation redesign, rest breaks. Another method of prevention is to warn persons at risk of developing the disorder so that they are informed about the hazards, the consequences, and what they can do to reduce the possibility of getting injured. The present research is an early attempt to develop an effective CTS warning system for keyboard operators. This study builds upon earlier research (Frederick, Wogalter, & Hink, 1997, *Proc of the IEA*) which had ergonomists and medical professionals with ergonomics expertise evaluate symptoms of CTS in an effort to ascertain the most important terms for a limited-space warning label. The present study had participants evaluate sets of potential warning components for the following categories: signal words (e.g., CAUTION, WARNING), symptoms of CTS (e.g., pain, numbness), instructions (e.g., keep wrists straight, use a light touch on keys), and consequences (e.g., continuous pain, may require wrist surgery). Pictorials were developed to supplement the warnings. Participants were asked to rate the items within each of these sets on their prospective utility in warning people about CTS. They were told that the purpose of an effective warning is to make people aware of the symptoms and potential consequences, and that it should be in a form strong enough to motivate compliance behavior. Lastly, participants were asked to create three differently-sized versions of an ideal CTS warning. The rated lists and the sample warnings could be useful for creating prototype CTS warning labels for further testing using an iterative approach.