The prevalence of pain and its impact on those with specific medical conditions provide an area of opportunity for improving workforce health and productivity.

Active employees at a Fortune 100 company headquarters in the northeastern U.S. with Internet access completed an electronic questionnaire in late 2004 (N=1,039; estimated response rate of 43.3%) measuring pain status, health status, presenteeism, work limitations, comorbidities and pain management indicators.

A total of 28.6% met the study definition for pain which combined two measurement tools (the SF-36 and Brief Pain Inventory). Pain [those affected were categorized as lowest (24.9%); medium (56.9%); and highest (18.2%) severity] was linked to a fivefold increase in health-induced work limitations, nearly three and three-quarters days lost to absenteeism and presenteeism over a 4-week period and increased prevalence of smoking, overweight and sedentary lifestyles.

Musculoskeletal conditions including arthritis, back pain, and neck and shoulder problems, were indicated as the disease grouping with the most opportunity as a starting point for corporate interventions.

Pain management strategies utilized by participants were measured across four categories: medication use (81%), complementary methods (25%), healthcare utilization (59%) and health-related behaviors (28%).

Results from employee satisfaction indicators suggest, however, that there are considerable opportunities for improvement in pain management impacting health and productivity across the pain severity spectrum.

Reference: