



CASE VIII

A worker in your department has taken an excessive number of sick days. You ask the company nurse what the problem might be. She says the worker has come in to ask for aspirin almost every day she has been at work for the last two months.

You go to observe the worker at her operation. Her job, which is in the rework area, involves using pliers to remove wires from a part before it is repaired. You ask the worker to demonstrate how she does her job. She shows you that she grasps the part in her left hand, and twists it as she uses the pliers to grasp and pull the wire out with her right hand.

You note that she does not use the stool provided. The worker says that it is uncomfortable; because she is short, her legs dangle. She explains that she has been absent due to pain in her back and numbness and tingling in her hands.

Guide and Background Information for Case VIII

Explain to the group, if asked, that there are at least two obvious ergonomic problems at the workstation: dangling feet and repetitive, forceful grasping combined with twisting of the wrist. The latter is probably responsible for the worker's back pain.

Other pertinent facts include:

- Her doctor told her that her hand problem was due to hormonal changes caused by menopause and that her back pain was likely caused by stress. Her doctor had not seen her work area; however, the doctor told the worker to take aspirin to relieve the symptoms.
- She told you she did not want to complain about her discomfort because she was afraid of losing her job.

Possible Solutions for Case VIII

1. Institute an ergonomics program that could include:
 - a. observation of work operations with employee involvement and input
 - b. medical surveillance to determine if and where workers are being injured
 - c. management commitment to making positive ergonomic changes where necessary
 - d. development of an ergonomically trained team of managers, engineers, medical personnel, supervisors, workers, and others



2. For this particular injured worker, the supervisor should observe which actions require forceful repetitive movement of the wrists. It is apparent that the worker had to twist both her left and right wrists while applying force to the pliers with her right hand. These repetitive motions have probably contributed to what appears to be carpal tunnel syndrome. Some solutions might be:
 - a. automating the operation
 - b. using a grip and clamp to hold the part, and using ergonomically designed pliers that prevent the wrist from bending
 - c. reducing the work rate
 - d. rotating the worker to other jobs that require use of different muscle groups

Summary

Institute an ergonomics program. Evaluate this and all similar operations to determine if other workers are experiencing similar problems. Investigate and establish specific solutions for these operations and obtain employee feedback on how well the solutions are working.