ABSTRACT

Purpose: Determine the economic impact of gout on workplace absence, productivity while at-work, and annual productivity.

Methods: We examined an employer database of more than 250,000 employees that tracked absences due to Sick-Leave (SL), Short-term and Long-term Disability (STD and LTD), and Workers Compensation (WC) from 2001 through 2004. For employees with jobs where units-of-production are captured, we also examined real work output data. We identified gout patients with an ICD-9 for gout.

Results: Data were available for 1,171 employees with gout and a control group of 243,687 employees without gout to explore differences in work absence. In addition, real work output data was available for 86 gout patients and 21,427 non-gout employees. Overall, the gout group had 4.6 more absence days per year than the non-gout group. By type of absence, the annualized days for gout and non-gout employees were: 25.0, 18.5, and 9.2 days per year between employees with gout and those without (17.9 versus P = 0.0003); LTD days (0.2 versus 1.7, P < 0.0001); WC days (1.6 versus 0.6, P = 0.0003). Analysis of at-work productivity found that average units-processed-per-hour did not vary significantly between the employees with gout and those without (17.8 versus 18.5, P = 0.05). Combined absence and at-work productivity results for the subset of employees with real work output data, employees with gout had 2.0% lower mean annual productivity than the non-gout group.

Conclusions: The potential cost to employees of gout due to acute flares, recurrent attacks, and development of chronic complications is substantial. Better management of gout may be required to improve the health and productivity status of the employee with gout.