

FOREWORD

The World Health Organization (WHO) has taken important steps recently to increase its activities with respect to injuries to the central nervous system, particularly injuries to the brain.

Brain injuries are generally defined as mild, moderate or severe, and mild brain injury represents the vast majority of all head injuries. Fortunately, most patients with mild traumatic brain injury recover quickly and without sequelae. However, there are a number of people who report long-term and disabling symptoms that do not necessarily correlate with the anatomical severity of the injury. In some cases, these injuries can have a substantial impact on both the patients' and their families' well being. Moreover, because of the number of mild traumatic brain injuries sustained each year, they place a substantial demand on healthcare resources, particularly at the emergency departments, where they are initially evaluated. As such, the social ramifications of mild traumatic brain injury are important.

In the last 2 decades, those persons working with the mild brain-injured population started to become aware and concerned that the human costs of mild traumatic brain injury and the economic costs for the treatment, management and lost productivity resulting from these injuries are substantial. It is essential then, that financial resources are targeted to preventing

these injuries and to interventions that have the potential to improve recovery and limit disability related to them. Therefore, there is more interest in investing in relevant research on prevention and supporting rigorous scientific evaluation of treatment and rehabilitation strategies.

In order to advance our understanding of mild traumatic brain injuries, there is a need to identify the best scientific evidence in support of prevention, diagnosis, prognosis and treatment, and to build on that scientific base. Therefore, the World Health Organization's Collaborating Center at Karolinska Institute in Sweden initiated a Task Force on Mild Traumatic Brain Injury to address these issues.

During the past 6 years the Task Force conducted a rigorous evaluation and appraisal of the literature on mild traumatic brain injury. The Task Force Report, published in this special supplement of the *Journal of Rehabilitation Medicine* presents a baseline of the relevant and scientifically admissible evidence on this important topic. It signifies a start to our understanding of what could and should be done now and in the future to address the human, social and economic ramifications of this public health issue.

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