

# UK's £6 billion back pain bill

BACK pain is a hidden epidemic which costs the UK £6bn every year, a leading expert said today.

The single greatest reason for time off work for ill health is back pain — 119 million working days are lost each year.

Paul McCormac, senior physiotherapist at Belfast City Hospital, said the problem in Northern Ireland reflects the UK pattern.

As part of National Back Pain Week, from October 16 to 22, physiotherapists have organised a number of events.

On Monday, there will be a Backworks conference at the Stormont Hotel in Belfast when practitioners will meet representatives from business and industry.

They will encourage co-operation between employers, employees and health professionals in rehabilitating sufferers.

The following day physiotherapists will meet ministers at Stormont

Castle to highlight the extent of the problem and the role physiotherapists can play in treatment and prevention.

And on Thursday, an advice stand will be set up at Sprucefield shopping centre.

"Back pain is often due to the cumulative effect of bad practice over many years — poor posture and sedentary lifestyles and jobs which involve staying in awkward positions for long periods," said Mr McCormac.

These can include repetitive tasks, driving long distances, lifting and twisting and carrying heavy weights.

However, it can also be triggered by something as simple as bending to pick up a child's toy or a ream of paper for the copier.

"These days the recommended treatment for acute back pain is to keep active — and not to lie in bed all day," Mr McCormac advised.

"This can be hard to understand when the back muscles have gone into spasm and you are in agony.

"The natural reaction to a sudden bout of back pain is to stop everything and go and lie down in case you cause more damage and more pain".

But, he said, research had shown that people get better faster if they keep out of bed.

"Back Pain Week is about getting across the important message that keeping active is the way to get better if you have acute back pain."