Beware Research Results Sponsored by Drug Companies

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According to the results of two surveys done 10 years apart, chronic back pain is more common now than ever before. Eighteen per cent (18%) of U.S. workers report chronic pain while on the job.

There is concern because companies suffer productivity loss from presenteeism instead of *absenteeism*. In other words, workers go to their jobs rather than use sick leave. But their work suffers for it.

With the aging of America and people being more likely to report chronic pain now compared to 10 years ago, this trend may be important. Experts in the field of pain control have said many times that pain is untreated or under-treated in the U.S.

But editors at the BackLetter took a closer look at the survey. They discovered the Ortho McNeil drug company paid for both studies. This is a company that just happens to have a drug (ULTRAM-ER) for chronic pain. BackLetter editors point out that neither survey has been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Until other studies can be done to confirm these findings, readers should be wary of press releases that give study results and suggest a medication at the same time. There may be a fine line between survey science and marketing, but there is a difference. As always, the warning *Buyer Beware* is a good one.

Is the Prevalence of Chronic Pain in the Workplace Rising? In *The BackLetter*. April 2007. Vol. 22. No. 4. P. 39.