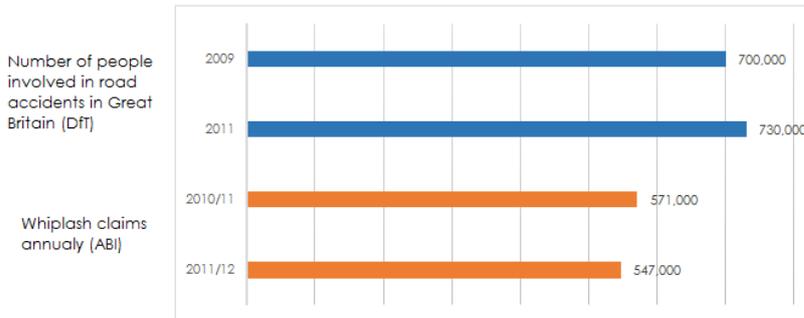




The term 'whiplash' was first used in the 1920. It referred to neck pain and allied symptoms occurring after a car accident. The presumed mechanism was a hyper-flexion/hyper-extension injury affecting the muscles, tendons, ligaments and other soft tissues of the neck. There is evidence that whiplash is widely overdiagnosed in the UK.

### Epidemiology

There is wide variation of the incidence and prevalence of whiplash in other countries with low figures in France and Lithuania. In other settings such as dodgems rides whiplash is rarely reported. There is no obvious medical factors to explain these differences.



Ratio of Claims to casualties: range—68—94%  
Most people in road accidents appear to make a claim for damages.

### Management of Whiplash: Treatment

Treatment. The Cochrane Collaboration (2010) was unable to recommend guidelines for treatment in the absence of high quality data. *This creates a therapeutic vacuum.* Likewise NICE has not yet drawn up guidelines for whiplash

### Problems with overdiagnosis: catastrophising minor physical symptoms

1. Negative expectations are raised in affected persons
2. The locus of control is shifted from the affected person to the external medical and legal professionals
3. This involvement creates a sense of ongoing disability and a self perception such as: 'I will never be the same again/never get better'
4. External 'experts' such as doctors and lawyers benefit directly from maintaining the diagnosis
5. This often leads to the deferral of treatment

### Financial sums associated with whiplash claims

#### 1. Medico-legal reports:

General medical practitioner (GP) reports	from £200
A and E reports	from £325
Orthopaedic surgeons reports	from £425

Association of Medical Reporting Organisations. (AMRO) 2012

#### 2. Average cost of a whiplash claim

Legal costs of a settled whiplash claim	£ 2,500
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Association of British Insurers (ABI)

#### 3. Amounts awarded by the courts:

Minor neck injury	"a few hundred pounds" to £6,380
Moderate neck injury (excluding fracture or dislocation)	£6,380 to £20,185

Guidelines for the Assessment of General Damages in Personal Injury Cases. 2013.

Judicial College, Oxford University Press

#### 4. Cost of physical therapy:

One session of physiotherapy	from £30 to £50
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### Management of Whiplash: Diagnosis

Diagnosis. Quebec Task Force of Whiplash Associated Disorders, 1995, graded whiplash into 5 categories of severity from 0: pain in the neck to 5: fractured vertebra. (Disadvantages: heavy reliance on subjective symptoms and the absence of objective signs)

### Definition of Whiplash Associated Disorder (WAD)

Grades the client complains of neck pain.

Grade 0	No physical signs
Grade 1	The client complains of neck pain. No physical signs. There is a normal range of motion (ROM) There is normal strength of muscles There is no swelling
Grade 2	The client complains of Neck Pain Musculo-skeletal signs are present Range of motion limited Spasm or swelling is present Point tenderness in neck or shoulders is present
Grade 3	The client complains of pain Neurological signs are present Reflexes are decreased or absent Skin sensation is decreased or limited Muscles weakness is present The range of motion is limited
Grade 4	Presence of fractures or dislocation of the cervical vertebrae

(Quebec Task Force)

### Possible 'Remedies' for overdiagnosis

1. Less willingness to make the diagnosis of whiplash in A&E units.
2. Ensure the provision of early physical treatment.
3. Commission medico-legal reports only after the completion of treatment (not before).
4. Doctors and insurers should challenge doubtful medico-legal reports.
5. Provide evidence based data on the management of whiplash to enable NICE to produce clinical guidelines.
6. Inform the judiciary of the essentially benign and self-limiting nature of whiplash injuries.

### Conclusions

Whiplash claims are usually supported by medical reports. As such doctors have a major role in maintaining high levels in overdiagnosis.

Some remedies have been suggested.