AWARD NUMBER: W81XWH-13-2-0043

TITLE: Lumbar Spine Musculoskeletal Physiology and Biomechanics During Simulated Military Operations

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Samuel R. Ward PT

CONTRACTING ORGANIZATION: University of California, San Diego
La Jolla, CA 92093

REPORT DATE: June 2015

TYPE OF REPORT: Annual

PREPARED FOR: U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command
Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012

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### 14. ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the relationship between 3D geometry of the lumbar spine, under different loading conditions and positions, and the pathophysiology of the intervertebral disc and lumbar trunk muscles. 42 Marines were scanned using upright MRI in a normal standing position, and in simulated operational conditions wearing PPE (n=30; weight=11.4kg), or scanned wearing load (22kg, 33kg, 45kg) distributed 20/80 or 50/50 anterior/posterior (n=12). 28 Marines were scanned in a high-resolution 3T MRI scanner to quantify muscle quality and IVD degeneration. Lumbar lordosis significantly decreases at all levels except L1/L2 when sitting. Even anterior/posterior distribution of load maintains whole lumbar lordosis as load increases. Subjects with IVD degeneration at L4/L5 had muscle volume differences.

### 15. SUBJECT TERMS

Spine, Lumbar, Kinematics, Muscle Architecture, Low Back Pain, Position
1. **INTRODUCTION:** The weights of loads carried into battle pose an injury and performance problem for the US Marines. Marine Corps assault loads range from 44kg for the rifleman to 61kg for the squad leader. These are well in excess of the recommended assault load of 22.7kg; 30% of body weight. Two things are clear: (1) Marines routinely carry more weight than the recommended limit, and (2) the Veterans Administration shows an increasing trend in disabilities related to lower back injury as a result of carrying excessive loads in operational environments. We have implemented new MRI technologies enabling quantification of lumbar spine kinematics under simulated march conditions. From these investigations, we have observed a large number (37.5%) of Marines with some evidence of disc pathology. However, it is unclear if these disc changes, or the expected concomitant muscle changes, are related to kinematic changes in the lumbar spine. Further, it is not known whether pre-existing disc pathology predicts future injury and service life in U.S. Marines. Our central hypothesis is that lumbar disc and muscle degeneration alters the kinematic response of the lumbar spine to functional positions and loads, predisposing individuals to injury.

2. **KEYWORDS:** Spine, Lumbar, Kinematics, Muscle Architecture, Low Back Pain, Position

3. **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

- **What were the major goals of the project?**
  - **Major Goal 1:** To compare lumbar spine kinematics in simulated operational conditions in Marines with measurable lumbar disc pathology
    - **Task 1-Approved IRB Protocols**
      - Local IRB Approvals
        - Due: 01 August 2013
        - Completed: 100%
      - HRPO Approvals
        - Due: 01 August 2013
        - Completed: 100%
    - **Task 2-Subject battalions identified and coordinated**
      - Subjects 1-33 recruited, consented and scheduled
        - Due: 01 February 2014
        - Completed: 100%
      - Subjects 34-66 recruited, consented and scheduled
        - Due: 01 August 2014
        - Completed: 24%
      - Subjects 67-100 recruited, consented and scheduled
        - Due: 01 Jan 2015
        - Completed: 0%
- Task 3-Data Collection/Analysis
  - Vertical data acquisition
    - Due: 01 December 2015
    - Completed: 42%
  - Vertical data analysis
    - Due: 01 February 2016
    - Completed: 42%

- Major Goal 2: To quantify changes in lumbar spine muscle architecture in Marines with measurable lumbar disc pathology.
  - Task 1-Approved IRB Protocols
    - Local IRB Approvals
      - Due: 01 August 2013
      - Completed: 100%
    - HRPO Approvals
      - Due: 01 August 2013
      - Completed: 100%
  - Task 2-Subject battalions identified and coordinated
    - Subjects 1-33 recruited, consented and scheduled
      - Due: 01 February 2014
      - Completed: 91%
    - Subjects 34-66 recruited, consented and scheduled
      - Due: 01 August 2014
      - Completed: 0%
    - Subjects 67-100 recruited, consented and scheduled
      - Due: 01 Jan 2015
      - Completed: 0%
  - Task 3-Data Collection/Analysis
    - Supine data acquisition
      - Due: 01 December 2015
      - Completed: 30%
    - Supine data analysis
      - Due: 01 February 2016
      - Completed: 30%

- What was accomplished under these goals?
  - Currently, we are behind stated goals on number of subjects recruited, consented and scheduled. After collecting upright and supine MRI images from the first 30 subjects, we decided to process all data to preliminarily determine whether or not we see and major differences between subjects
with/without back pain and with/without lumbar disc degeneration. We currently do not have the power required to detect significant differences between groups, but have identified trends in the data. We have determined that we need to scan more subjects in order to properly answer this question.

- During this last reporting period 12 Marines were scanned in an upright MRI machine in their normal standing position (StU; no load), and under 3 different load magnitudes (22kg, 33g, 45kg) and 2 different load distributions (50/50 and 20/80, anterior/posterior). Digital seed points were manually placed on the corners and the posterior elements of each vertebra using OsiriX. The location of the seed points were imported into Matlab and used to define an endplate-based joint coordinate system applied to the superior and inferior endplate of each vertebra.

![Active-duty Marines (n=12)]

**Standing Unloaded**

**Standing Loaded 22kg**

- Load distributed 50%-50%
- Load distributed 20%-80%

**Standing Loaded 33kg**

- Load distributed 50%-50%
- Load distributed 20%-80%

**Standing Loaded 45kg**

- Load distributed 50%-50%
- Load distributed 20%-80%

**Figure 1.** Schematic outlining the study design. Marines were scanned under each load magnitude and load distribution in an upright MRI machine, and center of pressure was measured using a force mat in a structure with the dimensions of the MRI scanner.
Figure 2. Photographs of the load distribution system used for this study. The black cable seen in the pictures is from the MRI coil.

Figure 3. Angle with respect to the horizontal was measured in each position to assess forward leaning angle of the whole lumbar spine. The dotted lines indicate the mean standing unloaded angle with respect to the horizontal. A decrease in angle with respect to the horizontal indicates a subject is leaning forward. A significant effect of load and distribution was found. When load is
evenly distributed, no change in forward leaning was observed. When load is distributed 20/80 anterior/posterior, subjects will lean more forward. Data shown is mean ± STD.

Figure 4. Cobb angle was measured in each position to assess lumbar lordosis. A.) Sagittal Cobb angle is measured from the superior endplate of L1 to the superior endplate of S1 B.) Sagittal Superior Cobb angle is measured from the superior endplate of L1 to the inferior endplate of L3 C.) Sagittal Inferior Cobb angle is measured from the superior endplate of L4 to the superior
endplate of S1. As load increases, the superior lumbar spine increases lordosis when load is distributed 20/80. There is a decrease in lordosis in the inferior lumbar spine when load is distributed 20/80. Data shown is mean ± STD.

Twenty-eight active-duty male Marines (27±6.9 years of age, body weight 81.11±11.03 kg) were scanned using a 3T MRI scanner. Imaging protocol consisted of: anatomical scan (Fig. 5), fat-water separation (Fig. 6), and T2 map (tissue hydration; Fig. 7). Erector spinae and multifidus (ES+M), psoas (PS), and quadratus lumborum (QL) muscles were manually segmented (L1-S1; Fig. 5). Muscle volume and fat fraction were calculated by lumbar level. Average T2 values were calculated for: IVD nucleus pulposus (L1L2-L5S1), ES only, M only, and ES+M together, and epimuscular fat regions at the L4L5 level. Participants were classified into two groups: with and without degeneration at L4L5 IVD (threshold: T2<115msec, Fig. 7). Two-way (lumbar level × L4L5 degeneration) repeated measures ANCOVA (covariate: body weight) and post hoc Sidak pairwise tests adjusted for multiple comparisons were conducted.

Figure 5. (Left) Axial anatomical image of paraspinal and trunk muscles delineated per manual segmentation, and (right) Anterior view of three-dimensional reconstruction of paraspinal and trunk muscles: ES+M (yellow), PS (green), and QL (blue).

Figure 6. Representative examples of water (left) and fat (right) composition images.
No demographic differences were found between the groups with (n = 16) and without IVD degeneration. A total of 16 Marines were found to have a degeneration at the L4L5 IVD. Weight was a significant (p < 0.05) covariate for all muscle volumes, but not for muscle fat fraction. No differences were found in ES+M and QL volumes between degeneration groups (Figs. 8A and 8C). However, a significant (p < 0.05) interaction between lumbar level and degeneration was found in the PS muscle at the L5 level (Fig. 8B). No significant (p > 0.05) differences were found in ES+M fat fraction content (Fig. 9A). Additionally, a significant main effect for degeneration was
found on the fat content in QL at the L3 and L4 lumbar levels (Fig. 9B). The T2 value of muscles of Marines with degenerated L4L5 IVD was not significantly different than that of those without degeneration, however ES had a significantly larger T2 value than M (Deg. L4L5: T2(ES+M) = 54.14±5.69 msec, T2(ES) = 43.36±5.54 msec, T2(M) = 37.25±2.80 msec; No Deg. L4L5: T2(ES+M) = 49.66±3.31 msec, T2(ES) = 41.15±5.25 msec, T2(M) = 35.15±2.31 msec).

- **What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?**
  - Nothing to report

- **How were the results disseminated to communities of interest?**
  - Results from this study were presented at the Military Health Research Conference (Ft Lauderdale, FL; August 2014) and the Orthopaedic Research Society Annual Meeting (Las Vegas, NV; March 2015)

- **What do you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?**
  - During the next reporting period, we intend on scanning 58 more Marines in both the upright and supine MRI scanners. To date, we have scanned 42 in the upright MRI and 30 in the supine MRI with 2 subjects dropping out of the study due to claustrophobia inside the machine. We will be analyzing the relationship between lumbar muscle physiology and lumbar spine kinematics data we have collected to date. We currently have three manuscripts in preparation for this study, which we intend on submitting in the next year.

4. **IMPACT:**

- **What was the impact on the development of the principal discipline(s) of the project?**
  - The results of this study may inform a set of load carriage guidelines to be put in place, through changes in training practices, gear design and/or implementation of exercises to strengthen the musculature of the spine. Additionally, the results of this study will allow researchers to better relate the complex 3D geometry of the lumbar spine in subjects with different levels of lumbar disc and degeneration and muscle health. The role of idiopathic lumbar back pain on lumbar spine kinematics will also allow us to investigate differences in the shape of the lumbar spine between a wide range of positions.

- **What was the impact on other disciplines?**
  - Nothing to report

- **What was the impact on technology transfer?**
  - Nothing to report

- **What was the impact on society beyond science and technology?**
  - The broad impact is that the load recommendations determined from this study can be applied to anyone who works with their spine under awkward or loaded positions.

5. **CHANGES/PROBLEMS:**

- **Changes in approach and reasons for change**
  - Nothing to report
Actual or anticipated problems or delays and actions or plans to resolve them
No adverse events occurred during the last reporting period. However, one adverse event has occurred during this study: one subject experiences peripheral nerve stimulation and claustrophobia in the supine scanner (19/02/2014). He was immediately removed from the scanner and calmed down. For this subject, kinematic but not anatomical supine data was acquired.

Changes that had a significant impact on expenditures
Nothing to report

Significant changes in use or care of human subjects, vertebrate animals, biohazards, and/or select agents
Nothing to report

Significant changes in use or care of human subjects
Nothing to report

Significant changes in use or care of vertebrate animals.
Nothing to report

Significant changes in use of biohazards and/or select agents
Nothing to report

6. PRODUCTS:

Publications, conference papers, and presentations


Journal publications.
Nothing to report

Books or other non-periodical, one-time publications.
Nothing to report

Other publications, conference papers, and presentations.
Nothing to report

Website(s) or other Internet site(s)
Nothing to report

Technologies or techniques
Nothing to report

Inventions, patent applications, and/or licenses
Nothing to report

Other Products
- Nothing to report.

7. PARTICIPANTS & OTHER COLLABORATING ORGANIZATIONS

- What individuals have worked on the project?

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<td>Name:</td>
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<td>Award #new award 03/01/2015-09/30/2016 2.4 calendar Office of Navy Research Program Evaluation of SEAL Delivery Vehicles Unit Level Training The primary aim of this project is to describe the physiological, physical, cognitive and sleep changes that occur during unit level training in a specialized military operational specialty.</td>
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<td>Award #N1421 10/01/2014-09/30/2015 2.4 calendar Army Special Operation Command Validating Gender-Neutral Standards for Army Special Forces (SFAS) and Ranger (RASP) Selection The primary aims of this project are (1) To determine whether the selection criteria for entry into SFAS/RASP training are accurate predictors of success during SFAS/RASP training; and (2) To establish task-dependent selection and training criteria, which could then be viewed as &quot;gender neutral,&quot; thus meeting the directive of the Secretary of Defense.</td>
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Award #N1336 09/01/2013-06/30/2015 9.0 calendar
Naval Special Warfare-WARCOM
265,000.00
Validating Gender-Neutral Standards for SEAL and SWCC Selection
The primary aims of this project are (1) To determine whether the selection criteria for entry into SEAL/SWCC training are accurate predictors of success during SEAL/SWCC training; and (2) To establish task-dependent selection and training criteria, which could then be viewed as “gender neutral,” thus meeting the directive of the Secretary of Defense.

Award #N1324 03/01/2013-09/30/2016 0.6 calendar
Office of Navy Research
Independent Evaluation of the ETOWL software program
The Office of Navy Research funded Iowa University to develop a virtual Marine that will predict the effect of load on physiological and biomechanical parameters. This project aims to independently test the developed software using “live” active duty military personnel to determine the accuracy of the software program.

Award #N1310 03/01/2013-09/30/2016 2.4 calendar
Program Manager-Infantry Combat Equipment
Personal Protection Equipment Development
The purpose of this project is to test a prototype of a novel plate carrier system against the existing plate carrier system in a variety of different load conditions as well as in various environments.

Award #N1305 02/01/2012-09/30/2015 1.0 calendar
Congressionally Directed Medical Research Programs
Lumbar Spine Musculoskeletal Physiology and Biomechanics During Simulated Military Operations
The purpose of this project is to determine if lumbar disc and muscle degeneration alters the kinematics response of the lumbar spine to functional positions and loads, predisposing individuals to injury.

Award # N1301 10/01/2012-09/30/2015 0.6 calendar
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<td>Evaluation of VASPER</td>
<td>The purpose of this project is to evaluate whether the VASPER system can be used as an adjunctive mode of training in U.S. Navy SEALs.</td>
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<td>The purpose of this project is to identify risk factors associated with hormonal imbalance in our elite forces. The study address caloric intake, expenditure, sleep hygiene, alcohol consumption as well as lifestyle choices that may influence hormone production in Navy SEALs.</td>
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<td>The purpose of this project is to identify risk factors associated with decrements in performance and to evaluate means by which to improve the Special Warfighter.</td>
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<td>Prescriptive Exercise Therapy Program to Reduce Hyper-arousal in Residential Treatment for Active Duty Service Members Diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder</td>
<td>To improve the quality of exercise/physical training the service members are receiving while at OASIS, as well as to develop a new exercise program and assist in training the staff at OASIS to maintain the quality of physical training after the project is complete. It is hypothesized that with better exercise and physical training there will be improvements in symptoms of PTSD, better compliance with exercise, increased mood and thus functionality of the persons obtaining treatment at OASIS.</td>
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| Funding Support: | **Ongoing Research Support**  
R01 HD073180-01A1 (PI: Ward) 04/01/2013 – 03/31/2018  
NIH/NICHD  
**The Physiological Basis of Rotator Cuff Muscle Rehabilitation**  
The goal of this project is to elucidate the structural, mechanical, and physiological consequences of tendinopathy-related muscle atrophy and degeneration after rotator cuff tears in humans. Architectural, passive mechanical, and gene expression profiles will be measured and compared amongst patients with different rotator cuff tear severities.  
DoD (PRMRP/CDMRP)  
**Lumbar Spine Musculoskeletal Physiology and Biomechanics During Simulated Military Operations**  
The goals of this project are to; 1) understand lumbar spine and lumbar disc kinematics during simulated operational conditions, 2) understand the effect of load and body position on spine and disc kinematics when pathology is present, and 3) understand the influence of muscle structure and physiology on lumbar spine kinematics.  
NIH/NICHD  
**Microsensor for Intramuscular Pressure Measurement**  
The purpose of this grant is to develop a miniature pressure transducer to measure tissue fluid pressure in skeletal muscle and then to determine the effects of muscle architecture, fascia, limb orientation and type of activation on pressure. The study employs the rabbit tibialis anterior muscle model and consists primarily of in situ muscle physiological experimentation combined |
with continuum mechanics modeling.

A6239R (PI: Lieber, CO-I: Ward) 10/01/2012-09/30/2016
Veterans Medical Research Foundation

**Mechanical Basis for Tensioning Tendon Transfers**
The purpose of this proposal is to measure the *in vivo* properties of muscles commonly used in tendon transfer surgery. We propose to develop a new instrument for measuring sarcomere lengths intraoperatively and to assess post-operative function in these patients.

1P30AR061303 (PI: Lieber, Core-Director: Ward) 09/01/2011-08/31/2016
NIH (NIAMS)

**San Diego Skeletal Muscle Research Center**
The purpose of this Center is to establish a consortium of skeletal muscle scientists between UC San Diego, Sanford-Burham, the Scripps Research Institute, and San Diego State University. The Center provides education, pilot funding, and direct scientific support.

NIH/NIAMS

**Rotator Cuff Degeneration and Repair.**
The purpose of this study is to measure the passive mechanical and related protein changes in rat skeletal muscle after rotator cuff tears.

NIH/NICHD

**“National Center for Muscle Rehabilitation Research.”**
The purpose of this grant is to provide a resource to the rehabilitation professionals to perform state-of-the-art muscle experiments. Disciplines include physiology, microscopic imaging, MR imaging and clinical measurements. In addition, the Center provides sabbatical opportunities and pilot project support to rehabilitation professionals interested in skeletal muscle research.

5 R01 AR057393 (Co-PI: Lieber, Ward) 7/01/2010 – 6/30/2015
NIH/NIAMS

“Muscle Biological and Biomechanical Response in Cerebral Palsy.”
The purpose of this proposal is to understand the changes that occur in muscles after contracture formation and to test conservative treatment options. This is due to the large number of children with CP seen in the rehabilitation setting and the number who undergo surgical correction for contracture (making their muscle tissue available)

R01 AR057013-01A1 (PI: Ward, Samuel) 07/01/2009 – 06/30/2014

NIH/NIMAS

Muscle Structure, Toxin Dose, and Exercise Affect Botulinum Toxin Efficiency.
The purpose of this grant is to understand the acute and chronic effects of botulinum toxin type A on skeletal muscle structure and function.
Experiments include muscle physiology, histology, cellular biology, MRI and bioluminescence measurements.

- Has there been a change in the active other support of the PD/PI(s) or senior/key personnel since the last reporting period?
  - Nothing to report

- What other organizations were involved as partners?
  - **Organization Name:** San Diego State University
  - **Location of Organization:** San Diego, CA
  - **Partner’s contribution to the project**
    - **Collaboration:** Sara Gombatto PT, PhD. Provided assistance during data collection and data interpretation

8. SPECIAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS
- **COLLABORATIVE AWARDS:** None
- **QUAD CHARTS:** See attached FY1415_QuadChart_W81XWH-13-2-0043

9. APPENDICES:
- Quad Chart: FY1415_QuadChart_W18XWH-13-2-0043.pptx
**Study/Product Aim(s)**
- To compare lumbar spine kinematics in simulated operational conditions in Marines with measurable disc pathology
- To quantify changes in lumbar spine muscle architecture in Marines with measurable lumbar disc pathology

**Approach**
Each Marine undergoes high-resolution structural and physiological imaging of the lumbar vertebrae and discs in a high strength (3T) supine MRI. Marines then undergo a 3D imaging protocol in an upright, low strength (0.6T) MRI in standing unloaded, standing loaded (25lb body armor), sitting loaded and prone on elbows positions. To investigate the effect of load magnitude and distribution, some Marines were scanned in standing unloaded and standing loaded conditions (6 conditions: 22kg, 33kg, 45kg x 50/50, 20/80 anterior/posterior). Back pain history is recorded for each subject at time of data collection.

**Timeline and Cost**

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**Updated: (20150505)**