

Causes and Treatment of Mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a form of lung cancer, predominantly caused by exposure to asbestos fibers. In fact, mesothelioma is a cancer of the mesothelium, the sheath that covers major organs such as the lungs (pleurum), the heart (pericardium) and the abdominal cavity (peritoneum). Pleural mesothelioma is by far the most common kind.

Mesothelioma and Asbestos

When asbestos fibers are inhaled, they become embedded in the lining of the lungs. Due to their small needle-like size, the normal defenses of the body are unable to detect them. Usually, any foreign bodies such as this would either be coughed up, or be removed through a build-up of mucus around them. But not asbestos. They cause inflammation of the lungs and tissue damage, leading to scarring and coughing. These are the initial symptoms of asbestosis, though asbestosis is not mesothelioma.

No one knows for sure why cancers develop, but once cancerous cells are formed in the pleura, it gradually becomes thicker, and over time restricts breathing and causes shortness of breath and coughing. What is known as 'pleural effusion' occurs, as the fluid of the pleura, designed to lubricate the movement of the lungs against the other organs nearby, builds up and exerts pressure on the lungs. The thickening of the pleura continues as an increasing number of cells become cancerous, until death eventually occurs.

The Effect of Smoking

Although smoking is known to lead to a number of forms of cancer, it does not in itself promote mesothelioma. However, a patient that has been exposed to asbestos, and who also smokes, will be more liable to contract the disease than a non-smoker will. This is why smokers are generally awarded lower sums in compensation than non-smokers with the same condition. However, it would be wrong to state that smoking is a cause of mesothelioma.

It is, however, the cause of many more lung cancer cases than mesothelioma caused by asbestos, and smoking and asbestos together also increase the risk of the patient developing general lung cancer, just as prolonged exposure to asbestos causes more than just mesothelioma. Asbestos lung cancer and mesothelioma are not the same thing.

Symptoms

The major symptoms are shortness of breath, weight loss, nausea and pain. This is true of all forms of mesothelioma, not only pleural mesothelioma. In the case of peritoneal mesothelioma, the abdomen becomes very painful and distended, just as the pleural version causes tightening and swelling in the chest due to pleural effusion. The pressure created can also result in pain, apart from that of the cancer itself.

Diagnosis

If the disease is not diagnosed early, then survival is unlikely. Therefore, any person who has previously worked in the asbestos industry, or has used asbestos in their employment, should make their doctor aware of that fact. They can then be placed on a schedule of regular examinations designed to detect the first signs of the disease. If the condition is detected early enough, most treatments available can be used effectively, and surgery is much more likely to be effective if the area affected is able to be isolated.

If you have contracted the disease, stopping smoking is essential, and you must try to avoid all infections of the lungs and airways. It is possible to have the condition treated, but if diagnosed too late then treatment tends to be palliative, and designed to make the patient as comfortable as possible.

It is essential, therefore, that people that have a history of contact with asbestos inform their physician immediately to make sure that if the symptoms do occur, they are spotted before any lasting harm can be done. Only then will there be a hope of a cure and successful recovery from this insidious disease.

About the Author

More information on mesothelioma is available at [Worry Bead](#) where details on the different types of the disease can be obtained.

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