

# *Mesothelioma*

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*a UK nursing and  
information project*

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# Mesothelioma

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Mesothelioma is a cancer. It most commonly affects the outer lining of the lungs (the pleura). In over 70% of cases it is caused by exposure to asbestos and there is often a 20 to 40 years time lapse between the exposure to asbestos and the development of this disease.

## Why was there a need for this project?

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- Previous rarity of the disease has led to a lack of knowledge amongst many Health professionals.
- As a consequence of this patients and carers have found information very difficult to obtain.
- It is necessary to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of sufferers.

## What are the objectives of the project?

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- To improve the standards of nursing care given to patients.
- To inform and educate health professionals and others involved in care.
- To provide accurate, accessible, up to date information about the disease to patients and carers.

## The two-year project plan

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- To establish a National Information Telephone Line for Health professionals, Patients and Carers.
- To form a countrywide network of Lung Cancer specialist nurses who will receive extra training to enable them to teach and deal with any queries in their areas.
- To improve the general level of nursing knowledge about the disease.

## Progress of the project plan to date – the telephone line

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The telephone information line was established in July 1999.

It operates for two days per week.

## Review of the calls received in the first year

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- 203 calls have been received from patients and carers. ( the majority of calls are from wives and widows of patients)
- 315 calls have been received from professionals. (204 of these from nurses)

## Analysis of major reasons for patients / carers calls

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- Most wanted more detailed information about the disease
- The majority wanted written information
- Many queries about latest treatment and trials available
- Many queries about benefits and legal position
- Many wanted to know what to expect as the disease progresses
- Many concerns about symptom control
- Several calls from bereaved spouses who had received little information prior to the death of their partners



## Analysis of major reasons for professional calls

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### Nurses

Mainly requesting detailed information about the disease to pass on to their patients. Questions centre particularly on symptom control, benefits, sources of asbestos exposure, latest treatments and trials, research etc. How best to organise future care for their patients.

### Solicitors

Many requests for written information about the disease for their own knowledge and to give to clients.

## Cont...

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### **Doctors**

Mainly requests for written information to give to their patients.

### **Support groups/Information Services**

Mainly asking for written material for their library services

## Progress to date – Nursing Network

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- 34 Specialist Nurses have now been enrolled into the Mesothelioma Nurses Network.
- These nurses have all attended extended training days on the subject.
- They are based in areas of high incidence of the disease in the UK.
- These nurses are committed to teaching other nurses about the disease to improve future care.
- These nurses will become a resource in their own areas when information is required about mesothelioma.

## Future plans

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*A plan is being developed to improve general nursing knowledge of the disease.*

*Material is being prepared to direct nurses to sources of information and assistance for themselves and for patients.*

## What is Mesothelioma?

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- A neoplasm arising from mesothelial cells which line serous cavities.
- The commonest site is the pleura
- The second commonest site is the peritoneum
- Rarely it can affect the serous coat of the testicle.

## Clinical Features

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- Often presents insidiously with aching chest pain, increasing breathlessness and commonly a pleural effusion.
- The general condition of the patient is usually quite good and the diagnosis frequently comes as a great shock.

## How the disease progresses .

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- The tumour spreads by local invasion of the chest wall, the brachial plexus, the mediastinum and across the diaphragm. It does not usually invade the lung.
- Distant lymph node involvement does occur but is rarely a problem
- The tumour frequently tracks down the biopsy wound site.

## Symptoms

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- Increasing breathlessness as the neoplasm thickens and obliterates the pleural space.
- Intractable pain caused by invasion into the chest wall
- Muscular weakness of the upper limb and pain caused by invasion into the brachial plexus and root of the neck.



## Symptoms cont.

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- Invasion and encasement of the oesophagus and the great veins can result in dysphagia and perhaps symptoms of SVC obstruction.
- Invasion of the pericardium may produce an effusion and cardiac arrhythmias.
- Invasion across the diaphragm can produce peritoneal deposits with ascites.

## Establishing the diagnosis.

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- Aspiration and drainage of fluid
- ‘Closed’ needle biopsy
- Thoracoscopy - VATS procedure
- ‘Open’ biopsy at thoracotomy
- Diagnosis and differentiation is very difficult. Mesothelioma is very similar histologically to adenocarcinoma

## Causative factors

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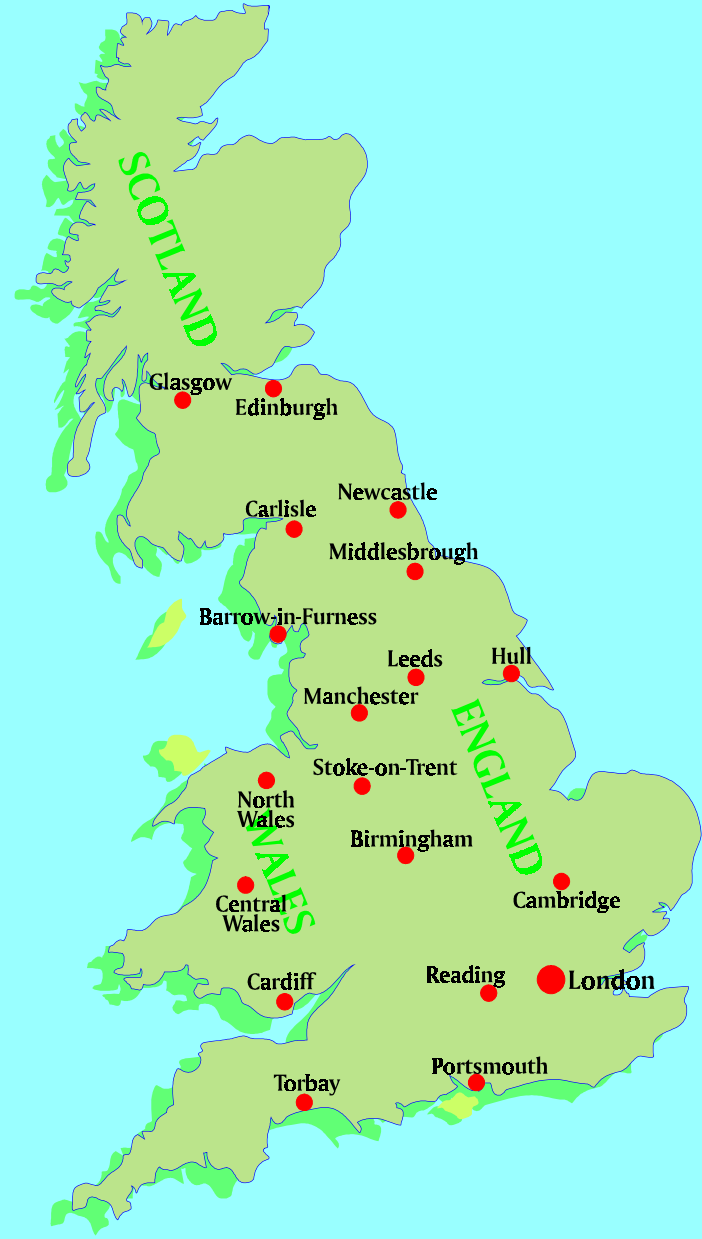
- Over 70% of cases are related to **asbestos exposure**
- There is frequently a 20 - 40 year latency period since exposure
- Rarely other causes may be - Erionite, Radiotherapy to the thorax, repeated inflammation of the pleura, SV 40, hereditary factors.

## Standard treatment.

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- Biopsy and confirmation of diagnosis.
- Pleurodesis.
- Radiotherapy to biopsy sites. (within 3/52)
- Good symptom control. Bv

*Network  
Nurses  
Established*



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