Being diagnosed with mesothelioma

– facts for the Armed Forces

What is mesothelioma?
Mesothelioma is a cancer caused by exposure to asbestos. It starts in mesothelial cells that are found in the lining of the chest and abdominal cavities. The UK has the highest incidence of the disease in the world with over 2,700 people diagnosed each year. Nine out of ten cases are found in the lining of the chest cavity – this is called pleural mesothelioma. Mesothelioma found in the abdomen is called peritoneal mesothelioma.

How does asbestos damage health?
Asbestos fibres are breathed (inhaled) into the lungs. The fibres are so fine they can penetrate deep into the smallest airways and air sacs of the lungs and cannot be breathed or coughed out. Because the fibres are long it is difficult for the body's defence mechanism to clear them. These processes lead to the development of asbestos-related diseases.

The earliest signs of the disease can be quite vague. The most common symptoms are breathlessness, chest pain, fatigue and weight loss. Sometimes it can take a number of investigations and hospital visits to diagnose the disease.

Are you concerned about asbestos exposure?

If you have been exposed to asbestos at any time during your Armed Forces service, you are potentially at risk. However, the majority of people who have been exposed to asbestos dust do not suffer ill health as a result. The period of time between exposure and the development of an asbestos related disease can be between 10 and 50 (or more) years. There is no way of identifying who will go on to suffer health problems and who will remain unaffected.

What should you do if you are worried about a previous exposure?

- Remember - the majority of people exposed to asbestos do not suffer health problems as a result
- Be aware of your own well-being and changes in your health
- Contact your Senior Medical Officer (SMO), Principal Medical Officer (PMO), GP or Mesothelioma UK for advice if you are concerned

Treatment for mesothelioma

The treatment of mesothelioma depends on a number of things including the type of mesothelioma, how advanced the disease is, the general health and fitness of the patient and their personal preferences.

There are various treatments for patients with mesothelioma. These include measures to control symptoms which may include one or more of the following, radiotherapy, chemotherapy, immunotherapy and surgery.

Not all patients are suitable for every treatment. None of the treatments available offer a cure but they aim to minimise symptoms, maximise quality of life and for some, lengthen life.

Some treatments are available through clinical trials.

Contact

If you're a serving member of the Armed Forces, a veteran, mesothelioma patient, family member or carer, a member of an Armed Forces partner organisation or other party interested about finding out more about how Mesothelioma UK is supporting our Armed Forces, the treatments and care available, or for advice on benefits/compensation claims, please contact Mesothelioma UK at:

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