

# Report on Asbestos Disease Symposium

Thursday September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012

**Location:** St. Michael's Hospital, Paul Marshall Lecture Theatre: Toronto

Alec Farquhar, Director, Office of the Worker Advisor introduced Symposium's objectives:

Dr. Paul Demers-Director of Occupational Cancer Research Centre stated that:

- There are over 200 new cases of mesothelioma yearly in Ontario and over 500 in Canada
- Asbestos mines were spread throughout Canada and most ceased operating in the 1990's,
- Mines in Quebec and Thetford Mines in Sarnia remained open
- Rather than declining numbers, new cases are at a plateau
- Many asbestos contained products exist in old public buildings

Dr. Marc de Perrot, University Health Network stated that:

- Asbestos related diseases occur mostly in men
- Due to late diagnosis of symptoms, there is usually rapid progression
- Median survival rate is from 6 to 12 months
- Chemotherapy improves survival rate by 2.8 months
- 45% of patients experience improvements in symptoms
- 1000 individuals were enrolled in a screening program
- Median age was 61 years
- 73% of participants were smokers
- Diagnosis took 2 to 12 months
- Conclusion: annual low dose CT chest scan can detect early stage of lung cancer by not of mesothelioma
- Treatment: chemotherapy, surgery and radiation
- Factors affecting final outcome: gender & nodal status

Dr. Eudice Goldberg, Chair, Canadian Mesothelioma Foundation stated:

- There is a need for an asbestos disease health care network
- New cases are plateauing not decreasing (500+ new cases a year)
- New cases are in all provinces across Canada but care across Canada is not equitable
- Only 40% of victims are referred to get compensation

- Goals of network are: Building a Community of Care, identifying where there are higher incidence & prevalence, Identify existing expertise, network resources with expertise especially in communities with higher incidence & prevalence of asbestos disease

Panel discussion:

- Potential for developing a kit for occupational history and where resources are located
- Even though Sweden was the first country to ban asbestos, there are still new cases being reported
- Asbestos still exists in old homes and the potential for exposure during renovations
- Challenge to identify families impacted by asbestos and create greater awareness
- Simple interventions can be implemented such as changing clothes and taking a shower before leaving work for home
- Compensation process should be improved
- Greater awareness of available resources
- 80% of asbestos exposure is work related
- However, some cars still have brake pads made with asbestos
- Dr. Tushar Kant Joshi, Director, Center for Occupational and Environmental Health, Maulana Azad Medical College, New Delhi, India enlightened everyone with the Indian perspective:
  - Set up Centre for Occupational & Environment Health in 1998
  - In 2004 and 2006 presented at International Conferences on Asbestos Exposure in India
  - Set up Occupational Health program for nurses
  - Little is understood about environmental issues
  - Families live right on the construction sites
  - No one wears protective gear, not masks, not gloves etc.
  - 94% of workforce is unorganized
  - 6% is in construction
  - 13 million work in factories
  - Only 938 inspectors available
  - Asbestosis is not a notifiable condition
  - Less than 1% of occupational diseases are reported and asbestos is not one of them
  - India now consumes over 4 million tons of asbestos yearly
  - Worldwide 125 million people are exposed to asbestos

- 95% of asbestos is used in cement sheets and pipes
- India is the top importer of Canadian asbestos
- Trying to raise awareness of dangers of asbestos results in intimidation, bullying etc.
- There is very little data available and very few cases reported
- Powerful industry and pro-asbestos movement including business influences the policy makers
- In 50 years, only 51 cases have been compensated

Eric Jonckheere, President, Belgian Society for Asbestos Victims told his family's story:

- Title: Silence, money couldn't buy
- Grew up in the Eternit asbestos factory
- 800 people in Belgium lose their lives yearly to asbestos
- Among them were his parents and 2 brothers
- Founded Asbestos Victims Association
- Travels world-wide to tell his family's story including the Congo