

Patients with functional somatic syndromes challenge the theoretical models of psychiatry and medicine, with the possibility that their case might be rejected by both. Abnormal illness behaviour can be a useful concept for putting the debate into perspective: distressed patients with somatic conditions who have repetitive or inappropriate medical demands show abnormal illness behaviour. So do non-adherent patients with severe medical disorders, at the other end of the spectrum.

I declare that I have no conflict of interest.

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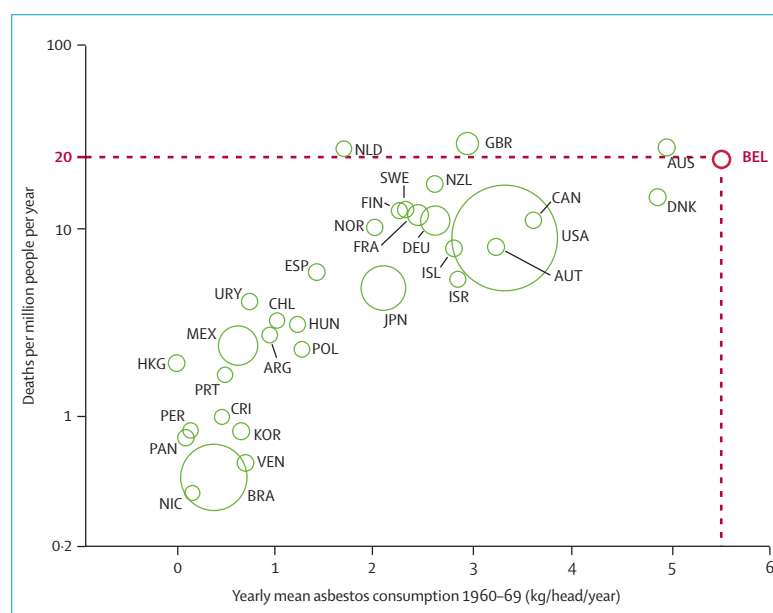
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## Belgium: historical champion in asbestos consumption

Belgium did not feature in Ro-Ting Lin and colleagues' ecological analysis (March 10, p 844)<sup>1</sup> of the relation between asbestos consumption in the 1960s and mesothelioma and asbestosis in the early 2000s. Yet none of the countries analysed had a per capita asbestos consumption as high as that of Belgium: 53 790 tons on average during 1960–70 for Belgium and Luxembourg,<sup>2</sup> for a total population of about ten million.

Belgium was absent from the analysis because of the lack of recent national mortality statistics.<sup>3</sup> However, reliable data on cancer



**Figure:** Ecological association between historical asbestos consumption and mortality from mesothelioma in men, reproduced from reference 1 with the inclusion of Belgium (BEL)

Data for asbestos consumption from reference 2; data for mortality from mesothelioma are those for 2000–04 in the Flemish region (60% of Belgium's population).<sup>4</sup> ARG=Argentina. AUS=Australia. AUT=Austria. BRA=Brazil. CAN=Canada. CHL=Chile. CRI=Costa Rica. DEU=Germany. DNK=Denmark. EGY=Egypt. ESP=Spain. FIN=Finland. FRA=France. GBR=United Kingdom. HKG=Hong Kong. HUN=Hungary. ISL=Iceland. ISR=Israel. JPN=Japan. KOR=South Korea. MEX=Mexico. NIC=Nicaragua. NLD=Netherlands. NOR=Norway. NZL=New Zealand. PAN=Panama. PER=Peru. POL=Poland. PRT=Portugal. SWE=Sweden. URY=Uruguay. USA=United States of America. VEN=Venezuela.

mortality are available for the Flemish region (about six million inhabitants).<sup>4</sup> These data indicate that 116 died of mesothelioma in the Flemish region in 2000, 143 in 2001, 122 in 2002, 111 in 2003, and 137 in 2004, giving a yearly average of 126 mesotheliomas in the Flemish region. Of these, 106 are men, thus giving a crude mortality from mesothelioma of about 35 per million men per year—ie, 20 per million men when standardised according to Lin and colleagues (figure).

The Belgian Fund for Occupational Diseases<sup>5</sup> recognised 203 deaths from asbestosis (197 men) between 2000 and 2004, giving an asbestosis mortality of about eight per million men per year—again, a figure higher than in any of the 33 countries in Lin and colleagues' study.

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