

Title:  
Mesothelioma

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574

Summary:

Without warning, a healthy individual suddenly becomes short of breath, x-rays reveal fluid on the lungs and the night mare begins. Questions are asked and you answer, Yes, I was exposed to asbestos dust ...

Keywords:

cancer, lung, mesothelioma, pain, symptoms, pain control, palliative care, courage, love, terminal diagnosis, terminal disease, prognosis, quality of life, asbestos, asbestos disease, asbestos death

Article Body:

Tragically the word mesothelioma is becoming more and more well known, the mere mention of it striking fear into all of us for we know that it is associated with death. Asbestos is the reaper, mesothelioma its hand maiden.

Asbestos, the wonder product of the fifties is now recognized as an enemy of the twentieth century. A ruthless enemy which will kill more people than the war. Men, women and children will fall victim to its prey, innocents who have at some time in their lives inhaled asbestos dust.

Most of us have been in contact with products containing asbestos in our life times. We sat in asbestos class rooms, stood beside our fathers as they cut asbestos fencing, pulled up old linoleum with asbestos clogged to the back of it. Visited the local tip where broken sheets of it lay open to the wind.

Records show that there are a higher number of people afflicted with asbestosis and mesothelioma who have directly worked in asbestos mines, ship yards and companies making products from asbestos; however there are a large number of people afflicted, who have never worked in these industries. Their contact with asbestos, due to the dust brought home on their husband's clothes or from the asbestos tailings placed around mine houses and town perimeters. But the tragedy does not end there, children innocently playing in their own back yards played amongst the asbestos tailings as children elsewhere play in the sand. They had no way of knowing that their sand was asbestos blue. A good bath at the end of the day may have removed the dust from the skin but the dust in the

lungs remained and would lay dormant for many years before claiming its deadly legacy.

Without warning, a healthy individual suddenly becomes short of breath, x-rays reveal fluid on the lungs and the night mare begins. Questions are asked and you answer, Yes, I was exposed to asbestos dust but I was only in the town for a few short months and that was over 40 years ago. How can this be? This is the most perplexing thing about mesothelioma. Why is there such a long period of time between inhalation of asbestos dust and onset of the disease? What triggers a strong healthy body to suddenly succumb to it? What can we do to prevent this from happening?

Blood tests are now available to determine whether mesothelioma is present in the body, before a person is aware of any symptoms. This is an amazing breakthrough and perhaps the first step towards curing the disease before it becomes terminal. Recently mesothelioma was cured in a mouse and attempts to give it back to the mouse were unsuccessful. This too is exciting stuff and holds a glimmer of hope for us all.

I have witnessed first hand the devastation of mesothelioma. My husband was a strong and virile man who rarely had a sick day in his life. Suddenly at the age of 52 he became short of breath and was subsequently diagnosed with pleural mesothelioma. He had lived in the asbestos mining town of Wittenoom in Western Australia for a few short months at the age of seven. The asbestos dust he inhaled then, took forty five years to become lethal. I still find this hard to believe.

Despite his prognosis of three to nine months, Brian survived for two years. He was 54 years old when he died.