

Asbestos Related Lung Cancer

For almost a 100 years asbestos was considered to be a surprisingly extraordinary mineral. It was used mostly for insulation in the building industry and woven into most every kind of product that could be manufactured. In the late 1800's it was reported that asbestos could cause severe lung injury to anyone that was exposed to it. Those reports were either ignored or intentionally suppressed. Not until 1931 did the British government start taking action to deal with the possibilities of lung cancer in those who worked with and were exposed to asbestos. In the early 1970's the United States government, following the British, began to document safety rules for handling asbestos. This truly was 50 years to late for many thousands of people who were exposed to asbestos in the environment, the home and especially in the workplace.

The results of exposure to asbestos in the environment and the workplace include pleural plaques, lung scarring, asbestosis, lung cancer and a particularly malignant, more severe cancer known as mesothelioma. Mesothelioma is almost exclusively related to exposure to asbestos. It's pleura, cancer of the lining around the lungs instead of in the lungs. Even a very short term exposure 10, 20, 30 or more years ago may result in mesothelioma. Smoking increases the risk of being diagnosed with mesothelioma dramatically. A patient who was exposed to asbestos that smokes has a 50 to 90 times greater chance of being diagnosed with lung cancer, including mesothelioma than a non-smoker. By contrast, a non-smoker exposed to asbestos has a five times greater chance of being diagnosed.

Asbestos Related lung cancers including Mesothelioma are diagnosed through a coalition of medical history, imaging technologies like x-rays, MRIs and CAT tissue sampling, scans, and biopsy. Those who are known to have been exposed to asbestos should have regular checkups for lung irregularities, as the incubation period between exposure and development of this disease can be as long as 5 decades.

As with any cancer, early diagnosis will give the best chance of recovery. Generally the accepted statistics for patients diagnosed with asbestos related lung cancer or mesothelioma are not good at all. In some cases, a person diagnosed with mesothelioma may be told that he has only 8-12 weeks to live, but there are many extenuating factors that may affect that. Some people in clinical trials that use a multi-treatment approach to treating mesothelioma have approached a 40% five year survival rate - almost as much as those diagnosed with other types of lung cancer.

It seems that the best response to Mesothelioma is an aggressive treatment that combines surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy. However, since mesothelioma is so often diagnosed in the later stages, surgery is not often an option, but there are some encouraging new advances in chemotherapy for treatment.

The first medication specifically to treat mesothelioma was approved by the FDA in February of 2004, Alimta manufactured by Eli Lilly. Alimta showed in clinical trials that in conjunction with another drug frequently used for treatment, cisplatin, improved the life expectancy of people diagnosed with mesothelioma. In a time where new advances are happening almost on a weekly basis, even a few months of extended life can propose hope for a cure.

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About the Author

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