CORRESPONDENCE

Study of occupational lung cancer in asbestos factories in China

Editor,—The article by Huilan and Zhiming contains some findings that are difficult to reconcile with our understanding of lung cancer. In table 6, 19 of 57 (33%) of lung cancer cases occurred among non-smokers. This is a very high number considering that in most series less than 10% of cases occur in non-smokers. We also note that the text says, "...67 lung cancers (including two pleural mesotheliomas) were found." Why does table 6 only show 57 and not 65 or 67 lung cancers? Table 3 indicates that lung cancer in women is less than half that of the men, although the rates are apparently not adjusted for age or smoking. If asbestos was thought to cause a high percentage of the lung cancers, male and female rates ought to be closer together.

The finding which most seriously calls into question the results of this study is in table 6, where the lung cancer relative risk for smokers (without asbestos exposure) is only 1.8. The usual relative risks for populations of smokers range from 5 to 25,* depend on the amount and years smoked. A study that finds a relative risk this low raises serious questions concerning the credibility of any of the findings.

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REFERENCE


Author’s reply

Editor,—I would like to make a brief reply to Morgan and Zhao about their comments on our manuscript.

Firstly, in table 6, 19 of 57 (33%) of lung cancer cases occurred among non-smokers, 15 of whom were exposed to asbestos, so for four cases were neither exposed to asbestos nor smoking.

Secondly, why does table 6 only show 57 and not 65 or 67 cases of lung cancer? The data given were only from seven factories. In the control groups of the eighth asbestos factory questions were not asked about smoking.

Thirdly, table 3 shows that the incidence of lung cancer in women is less than half that in the men. This is true, and our SMR can be compared with the SMR of lung cancer of the nationwide investigation (1973-1975). The SMR of lung cancer for men was 6.26 and 10.47 for women. The data for men and women were statistically compared with control data (p < 0.01). Table 6 indicates that smoking alone increased the RR of lung cancer only to 1.8. The number is lower than expected, we thought that might be due to a much lower average consumption of cigarettes before 1982 in China than in some western countries.

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REFERENCES


NOTICE


With over £13 billion lost through sickness at work, companies need to take a hard look at health care in the workplace. The Wellness Forum was set up in 1992 to do just that and share and develop best practice.

The Forum now has over thirty five members with hundreds of other organisations and individuals attending events and receiving updates on our work. We sit on the steering group of the Health of the Nation Task Force and run a national competition to find the United Kingdom's most health conscious company.

We are arranging a seminar later this year and you may wish to note details for your diary:

19 October 1994. Management of musculoskeletal problems in the workplace. During the National Workplace Health and Safety Week (17-21 October) experts from the fields of ergonomics, risk management and physiotherapy will discuss the prevention and management of these problems which cost employers around £650 million a year. The emphasis will be on practical and successful outcomes. The seminar will be held at Imperial College in central London.

Further details from: Paula Feery, Priory House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BC. Telephone: 071-498 3634. Fax: 071-498 3658.

BOOK REVIEWS


The authors intend that this book should serve as a handy reference volume for industrial physicians and nurses, occupational safety and health personnel, legislators, attorneys and others.

The subject matter seems to fall naturally into two sections. The authors themselves make the most substantial contribution in the first section, in which they discuss the physics of sound, audiometry, and the clinical aspects of hearing loss. The emphasis is on non-occupational causes of hearing loss, with much use of case illustrations. After this clinical section, there are a series of contributions on noise measurement and control, hearing conservation programmes, and legal issues (mainly concerning American practice), with diverse topics such as hearing loss in musicians, hearing loss in the railway industry, and hearing conservation under water are also covered.

The clinical section contains much information that is not otherwise readily accessible, but is difficult to use because of the layout. After the standard medical reference format of etiology, pathology, clinical features, causes, and treatment, one factual disorder to be discussed would increase user friendliness. Occupational hearing loss is discussed within this clinical section, but in a separate chapter of some 14 pages. This is short for the title material of a reference volume. Some of the material presented elsewhere could be included here and expanded upon—for example, the epidemiology of noise induced hearing loss and the use of audiometry in diagnosis.

There is much useful information in the second section, although the utility of some of this is diminished by the fact that it concerns American practice. For example, there is a good section on prevention of hearing injury in industry that could find a wider readership if there was less emphasis on the Occupational Safety and Health Administration criteria, and a more general discussion on the derivation of damage risk criteria.

As a reference for the diagnosis of non-occupational hearing loss, and for some aspects of hearing conservation this book (apart from the criticisms concerning layout) is excellent. Readership should include those in the legal profession who deal with claims for noise induced hearing loss, for example. It will also be a useful library reference for the occupational physician, but there is still a niche in the market for a substantive text that deals primarily with the practical problems of hearing loss in the workplace.

DAVID MCBRIDE