The Truth about Mesothelioma

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You’ve likely seen the TV ads for mesothelioma treatment and lawsuits, but how much do you really know about this devastating disease?

(Newswire.net -- October 13, 2016) -- It’s important to understand the role asbestos exposure plays in mesothelioma so you’re aware of the risk of this toxic substance.

One of the most concerning facts about mesothelioma is that it typically takes 20 to 50 years for symptoms to develop. This gap between asbestos exposure and the onset of symptoms, known as the latency period, is what makes the disease more life-threatening than many other cancers.

The earlier that cancer is detected, the better the prognosis, but since mesothelioma typically doesn’t display symptoms until late stages, it’s often not found until it’s difficult to treat. Because of this issue, it’s important to understand mesothelioma so you can know if you’re at risk.

Here are some things to understand.

#1 What causes mesothelioma?

The primary known cause of mesothelioma is the inhalation or swallowing of airborne asbestos, a naturally occurring mineral fiber that was once widely used in home construction products like insulation, floor and ceiling tiles, and more. When disturbed, these microscopic fibers can release into the air.

According to Mesothelioma-Directory.com, “Asbestos is made up of tiny fibres. You can breathe these fibres in when you come into contact with asbestos. The fibres work their way into the pleura, lining the lung. They irritate the pleura and may cause gene changes (mutations) that lead to the growth of cancer.”

Research shows that approximately 3,000 Americans are diagnosed with mesothelioma each year and the majority of these individuals were directly exposed to asbestos at work or exposed second-hand through a loved one that worked with asbestos.

#2 What are the symptoms of mesothelioma?

One of the reasons mesothelioma can be so difficult to diagnose is there are dozens of possible symptoms – and many mimic less-serious conditions. Mesothelioma symptoms fall into three general categories: pleural (in the lungs), peritoneal (in the abdomen), and pericardial (in the heart).

Pleural symptom frequently include abdominal swelling, loss of appetite, chest pains, coughing up blood, fluid buildup, and lumps under the skin of the abdomen or chest. Peritoneal symptoms include anemia, bowel obstruction, hernias, vomiting, and unexplained weight loss.

Pericardial symptoms include many of those listed above, along with difficulty breathing, heart palpitations, heart failure, heart murmurs, and shortness of breath, among others. All of these can indicate other conditions and complicates the diagnostic process.

#3 What treatments are used with mesothelioma?

For years, the medical community has searched for effective treatments for mesothelioma patients. As with any cancer, early detection is key to improved life expectancy, but mesothelioma is rarely found until Stage III or IV when there are fewer options.

In addition to surgery, radiation and chemotherapy may be recommended – or a combination of these approaches - depending on the patient's overall health, age, and the stage of cancer. There are also clinical trials that may be helpful.

“When a patient is diagnosed with mesothelioma, the doctor may recommend participation in a mesothelioma clinical
trial that is testing the success rate of a new treatment,” according to Bergman Draper Ladenburg. However, it’s important to note that clinical trials come with risks and may not be open to all patients.

For late-stage mesothelioma patients, treatments options are often palliative – aimed at relieving pain and discomfort of symptoms.

#4 What are mesothelioma survival rates?

As with other late stage cancers, mesothelioma is often terminal; however, it is not always an immediate death sentence. Some people have survived for years after their initial diagnosis, but the earlier the diagnosis, the better the life expectancy.

Follow your doctor’s instructions, pursuing all available treatment options, and leading a generally healthy lifestyle can help. Being an informed patient is also wise – you should educate yourself about your illness, treatment options, clinical trials, and how you can help yourself.

Whether you have mesothelioma, know someone who does, or think you may have been exposed to asbestos in the past, it’s important to be informed and stay up to date on mesothelioma diagnosis, treatment, and health information about the disease.