

Mesothelioma awareness and compensation in BC

About mesothelioma

Mesothelioma is a rare form of cancer with a single, well-established cause: exposure to asbestos or related minerals. The production and use of asbestos in Canada peaked in the mid-1970s and then declined sharply, but the number of mesothelioma cases in British Columbia continues to increase. More than 80% of cases are likely caused by workplace exposures, with an onset of symptoms 30 to 40 years after exposure.

Goal of this study

This project used data from the BC Cancer Agency (BCCA) tumor registry and from WorkSafeBC (British Columbia's workers' compensation agency) in order to examine trends in mesothelioma cases and compensation over time, and the factors influencing compensation in BC.

What we did

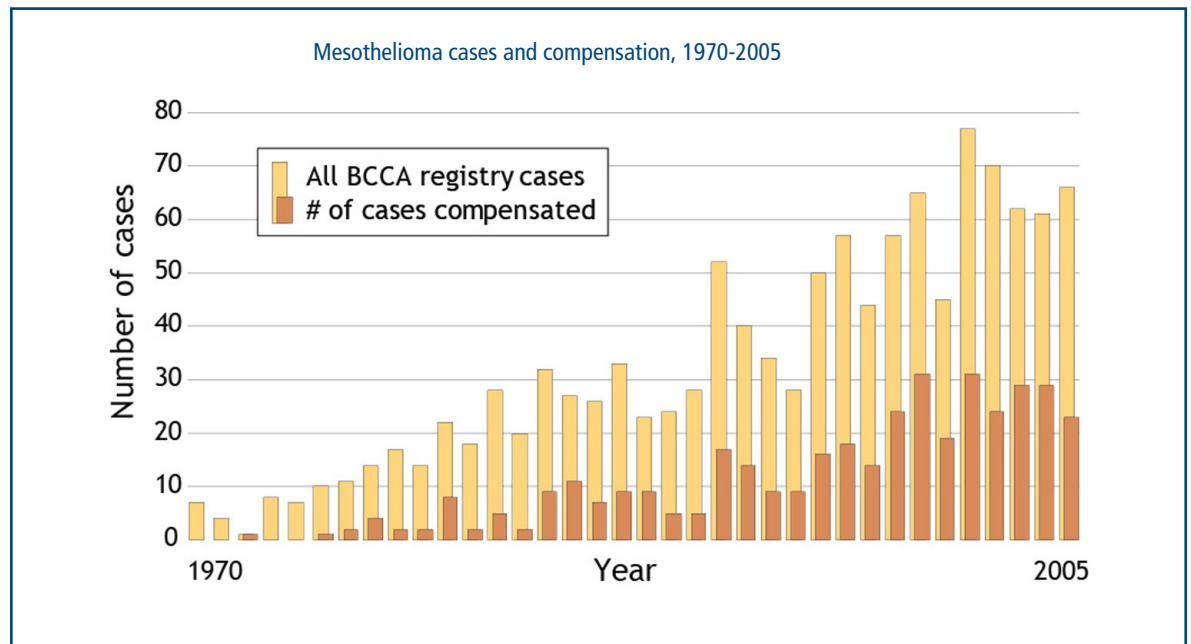
Data sources used in this project include all WorkSafeBC mesothelioma claims and all BCCA tumor registry mesothelioma cases from 1970 to 2005.

The compensated and non-compensated BCCA cases were compared, and a statistical analysis determined the influence of demographic factors on the odds of submitting a claim.

What we found

This study found that less than half of all mesotheliomas in the province were compensated by WorkSafeBC (see graph below). This suggests that clinicians and workers may not be aware that mesothelioma is a work-related disease, and that they may be eligible for compensation.

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Women, the elderly, and those living in urban areas are the least likely to receive compensation. Compensation rates also vary by region of the province, and these results suggest that public knowledge in large industrial settings with known asbestos exposures may influence awareness of compensation benefits (see map, below).

Implications of this research

Although mesothelioma is almost entirely attributable to occupational asbestos exposure, the majority of those diagnosed with the disease are not compensated by WorkSafeBC. Low compensation rates may be placing an economic burden on public healthcare systems, and on individual families of those with mesothelioma.

The results from this study can help regulatory and public health agencies develop effective notification systems to ensure that all individuals newly diagnosed with mesothelioma seek compensation benefits.

From research to practice

In 2005, the BCCA and WorkSafeBC launched an intervention to increase awareness of workers' compensation benefits among mesothelioma patients. Physicians of patients in the cancer registry were mailed a letter asking them to provide informa-

tion to their patients about the work-relatedness of mesothelioma, and to encourage them to ask about workers' compensation benefits.

Phase II of this study is evaluating the effect of the physician intervention letter on claim rates.

Based on research presented in

Kirkham TL, Koehoorn MW, McLeod CB, Demers, PA. Surveillance of mesothelioma and workers' compensation in British Columbia, Canada. Occupational and Environmental Medicine. 2010; doi:10.1136/oem.2009.048629

Geographic variation in compensation rates: 1970-2005, by health service delivery area

