

The Role of Physicians in Increasing Workers' Compensation Benefits for Individuals with Mesothelioma in British Columbia, Canada

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Objectives

Mesothelioma is a cancer principally caused by occupational exposure to asbestos, but less than one-half of mesothelioma patients receive workers' compensation in Canada.

We evaluated a letter sent to physicians of patients newly diagnosed with mesothelioma by the British Columbia Cancer Agency informing them of workers' compensation benefits and asking them to advise their patients to seek compensation.

Methods

Mesothelioma cases in the British Columbia cancer registry were linked with accepted workers' compensation mesothelioma claims. The proportion of compensation cases in the pre-letter period (January 2000 to October 2004) was compared to the proportion in the post-letter period (November 2004 to December 2009), by demographic, clinical and geographic characteristics. Adjusted incidence rate ratios investigated the effect of the letter on compensation status.

Results

Between 2000 and 2009, 668 mesothelioma cases were diagnosed in British Columbia. During the letter period, 216 of 364 cases received a physician letter. Those with a longer survival time were more likely to receive the letter. The proportion of compensation was 43 claims per 100 cases during the pre-letter period compared to 40 claims per 100 cases during the post-letter period (IRR=1.12, 95% CI: 0.84-1.49). Among those sent the letter, there were modest increases for women, younger (<55 years) workers and those with a shorter survival time (<2 months).

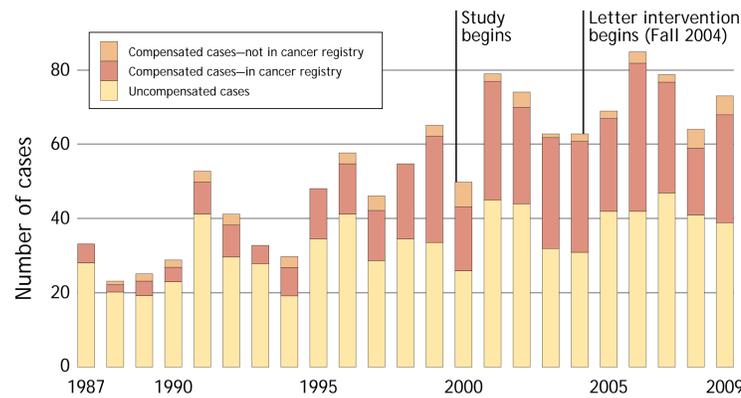
Conclusions

The letter intervention had little effect in increasing mesothelioma compensation except among groups with historically low compensation rates (e.g., women, those who survived less than two months after diagnosis). Interventions such as physician and patient education may be needed to increase the compensation rate of mesothelioma.

Next steps

We are conducting interviews with patients to understand why they may or may not seek compensation and with physicians to understand why they may or may not provide advice to patients on compensation for occupational disease.

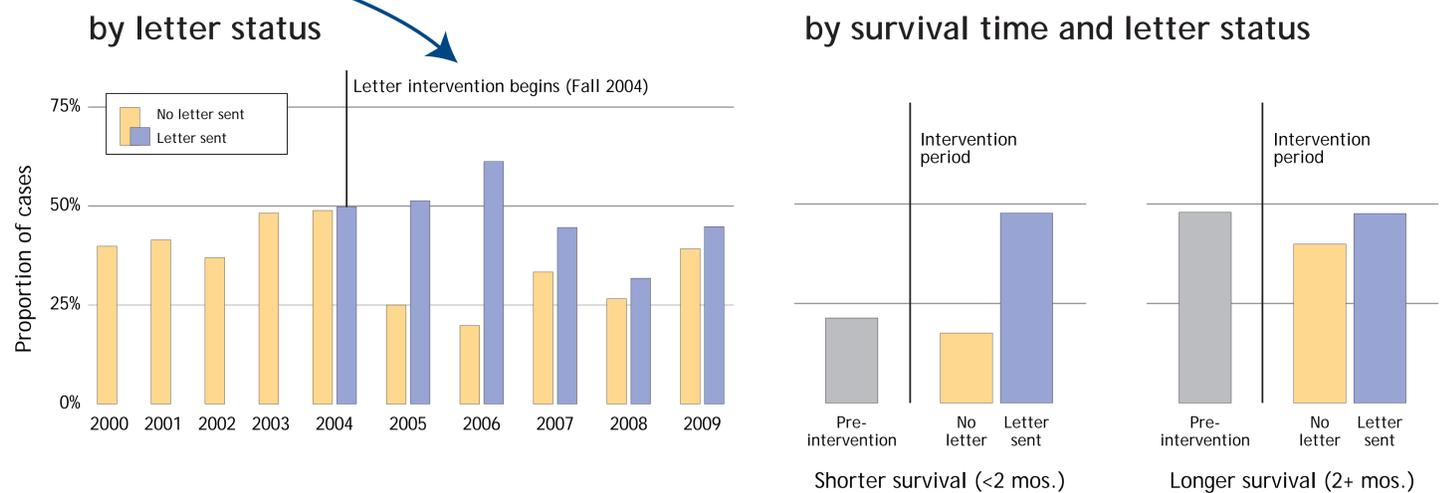
Number of compensated and uncompensated mesothelioma cases
British Columbia, 1987-2009



The proportion of mesothelioma cases compensated has increased since 1987, but has remained around 50% since our study began in 2000.

In the initial phase of the intervention there was an increase in receipt of compensation for those who received a letter, but this was not the case in latter years.

Proportion of mesothelioma cases compensated
British Columbia, 2000-2009



Likelihood of compensation for mesothelioma cases
British Columbia, 2000-2009

