



Making the Link: Identifying patients with lung cancer and mesothelioma who were exposed to Asbestos

The goal of the **Making the Link** study is to identify workers with lung cancer or mesothelioma who may have been exposed to asbestos. Identifying these workers and helping them get compensation will improve their lives and the lives of their survivors significantly.

Data from the Occupational Cancer Research Centre has highlighted the extreme underreporting of asbestos exposure amongst people with mesothelioma and lung cancer. We estimate that roughly half of the occupational asbestos-related mesotheliomas and less than 10% of occupational asbestos-related lung cancers (136/1708 = 8%, 2010 figures) are compensated each year.

By answering four questions, patients can say whether they believe they have been exposed to asbestos during their working years. Patients will be asked these questions at Lung Clinics at the 14 Regional Cancer Centres. Once diagnosed, they can then be referred to the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers who can help them file for compensation from the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board.

This project is very much a group effort. It was initiated by Dr. Linn Holness (Director of the Centre of Research in Occupational Disease, St. Mike's Hospital) more than a decade ago, and studies have been done in collaboration with the Occupational Cancer Research Centre at Cancer Care Ontario. Pilot studies have been done at St. Mike's, the Juravinski Cancer Centre, the Princess Margaret Hospital, London Health Sciences, and Bluewater Health in Sarnia.

From these studies we know that:

- It is important that lung cancer and mesothelioma patients be asked about their exposure to asbestos
- Patients are not presently asked about their work or exposure to asbestos
- Only a few questions are needed
- These questions could be asked by a number of providers at Lung Clinics
- There are many barriers for sick and old patients to take the initiative to file for compensation
- Having someone or an organization to whom to refer worker-patients is important.

We are partnering with the Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers (OHCOW) who can help patients with the difficult task of recreating their work-histories and determining the intensity of their exposure; help them file for compensation; help expedite and facilitate receiving certain treatments and special life comforts; and help the patients' survivors. OHCOW can also provide occupational expertise to the Lung Clinic providers if they need it.