

lung smear. The large majority (29 of 31) of male mesothelioma cases had fibre concentrations equal to or greater than those of a group of routine autopsies with numerous bodies in the lung; the occupational data for routine necropsies indicated that a large majority of the patients with numerous coated fibres had previous definite or probable exposure to asbestos, in contrast to those with occasional fibres. The author therefore concluded that persons with occasional fibres on analysis have a very small chance of developing pleural mesothelioma compared with people having numerous coated fibres in the lung. This study once again pointed to (para-)occupational exposure to asbestos as an important cause for mesothelioma. Pooley (1973) examined 120 cases of pleural mesothelioma; only in 9 cases could he not find asbestos fibres in the lungs. These data strongly suggest that examination of lung tissue for indications of past exposure (see VII) may provide a more sensitive method of detecting past exposure than history taking; the given percentage of 10-15% may be an overestimate.

There is a general agreement that the risk of mesothelioma is fibre related in the order crocidolite > amosite > chrysotile > phyllosilicate, but the magnitude of of the difference between the various types of asbestos is not well established.

Some authors tried to evaluate the prevalence of mesothelioma among the general population. According to Bohlig et al (1973) mesothelioma is found in 0.18 to 0.7% of all autopsies. Nurminen (1975) quotes the following data: 0.27% of autopsy cases in Malmö-Sweden; 34 cases in 6 years in a population of 6 million in Pennsylvania, i.e. about 1 per million per year; in England, Scotland and Wales 2.3 cases per million per year; the author calculated the incidence for pleural mesothelioma in Finland as 1.1 per million per year; there was no clustering related to possible asbestos exposure; the male/female ratio was 1.3; the urban/rural ratio 4.4. Sturm (1975) quotes the following data: mesotheliomas in 0.5% of autopsies in Basel-Switzerland; 1.3% in Zürich-Switzerland; 4.4% in Halle-DDR; 1.5% in Vienna-Austria; 1.25% in Dresden-DDR. (Some data only refer to pleural mesothelioma, others to mesothelioma as such). In most countries there has been an increase in the past decades; awakened interest among clinicians, pathologists, epidemiologists certainly has also contributed to this increase. Nevertheless it has been unequivocally established that in autopsies of asbestos workers the prevalence has been remarkably higher. Hain et al (1974) reported a prevalence of 3.2% of all autopsies in the Hamburg area, probably related to the increase in various possibilities of exposure in this city with harbours, shipyards, heavy industry,

8001 0783

PRODUCED BY EORN