FILE NAME: Merck (MK)

DATE: 1943

DOC#: MK002

DOCUMENT DESCRIPTION: Book Excerpt - Other Pneumoconioses [The Principles & Practice of Industrial Medicine

The Principles and Practice of

INDUSTRIAL MEDICINE

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BALTIMORE

THE WILLIAMS & WILKINS COMPANY

1913

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VII. OTHER PNEUMOCONIOSES

There is considerable disagreement in the medical literature concerning the exact etiology of certain types of pulmonary fibrosis due to dust inhalation other than silica dust. Asbestosis, siderosis, and anthracosis are the most important of these fibroses.

Asbestosis

It has been well proven that a peculiar type of linear pulmonary fibrosis is caused by minute asbestos fibers inhaled by workers in industries utilizing asbestos for the manufacture of fire resisting material, insulation, certain fabrics and ropes, paints, roofing, tile, etc., as well as the manufacture of asbestos itself.

Asbestos is magnesium silicate and is the only silicate which has experimentally been proven to produce a pulmonary fibrosis without exposure to silica.

The onset and clinical course of asbestosis is similar to that of slowly progressing silicosis and the symptoms in the later stages are identical. Fatal termination is usually by complicating pneumonitis, cardio-vascular decompensation, or tuberculosis. The roentgenopathology is typical and not difficult to differentiate from silicosis. Gloyne and Merewether state that the roentgenological appearances of asbestosis are revealed typically as a general lack of translucency with a fine pinhead mottling. This is the characteristic "ground glass" appearance. The film should always be compared with a film of a normal patient and a film of a silicotic patient taken with the same exposure.

The diagnosis depends upon a definite history of exposure to asbestos dust including sufficient period of exposure, roentgenological appearance, decreased pulmonary capacity, and the finding of asbestos bodies in the sputum of patients not yet removed from exposure to the dust. These asbestos bodies are well described and usually illustrated in most text books of clinical pathology. The pathology may be summarized in the single statement that it consists of a persistent, progressive, diffuse perialveolar fibrosis of the lungs. The fibers may be seen on histological examination to lie embedded in the fibrous walls of alveoli and bronchioli and each fiber appears to be encrusted by an iron-containing yellow pigment. As would be expected, in the later stages the fibrosis becomes confluent and massive.

Siderosis

Siderosis is chiefly a red pigmentation of the lung tissue due to inhalation of iron-containing dust frequently found in hematite miners. Experimentally, fibrosis has not been produced by pure iron or iron oxide dust

and only when mixed with hazardous concentrations of silica dust does fibrosis result. Therefore, unless the patient is also affected with silicosis siderosis by itself is asymptomatic and produces no roentgenological or clinical findings.

Anthracosis

Black pigmentation of the lungs due to inhalation of smoke and other types of carbon particles is common particularly in residents of large industrial cities. Most marked blackening is produced in coal miners. There is some controversy concerning the question as to whether or not carbon dust of itself can produce a pulmonary fibrosis. There is no conclusive experimental evidence that pure carbon dust will produce fibrosis. It is the author's opinion that all instances of fibrosis in anthracotic lungs are due to an admixture of silica dust in the inhaled air or an inflammatory fibrosis due to respiratory disease. Anthracosis is asymptomatic and produces no clinical findings or disability.

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