

some knowledge of dust levels and fibre type) and confirmatory clinical findings of pulmonary fibrosis.

Many workers who have been exposed to asbestos never develop any x-ray changes and only some develop asbestosis. It is not morally justified to suggest to a symptom-free, otherwise healthy individual that he or she is suffering from an incurable dust disease with a concomitant cancer risk, if there is not definite proof. If the disease is "definitely suspected" then the individual has a right to know, to cease exposure and to seek compensation. It is not yet known whether the improved methods of examination available permit the detection of the disease at a stage where further progression can be prevented if exposure ceases. The disease is now almost certainly diagnosable at an earlier stage than 46 years ago in Merewether's time. The disease will probably progress in the more advanced cases even when exposure to asbestos dust has ceased.

The British worker has changed his job habits and it is unusual to find him working in one firm or one job for as long as 20 years. Asbestosis is a preventable disease — it now remains to prove whether lung cancer and mesothelioma are preventable by the same means. With regard to lung cancer the eradication of the cigarette habit will undoubtedly also lead to the eradication of this complication of asbestosis.<sup>15</sup>

In a large asbestos textile factory in Rochdale the prevalence of asbestosis has been reduced in 1975 to 0.77% among the current labour force compared with Merewether's finding of 26.2% in 1929. (Table). This reduction has been achieved by conscientious effort on the part of management to eliminate the disease. In recent years there has been a growing awareness among workers in industry of their role in the prevention of occupational disease and when enlightened management takes advantage of this new willingness to cooperate, then useful practical measures follow. Confrontation is not the way to better health. Elimination of occupational disease depends upon joint consultation and sensible application of the most reliable and practicable preventive measures, implementing Legge's aphorism that unless and until the employer has done everything, and everything means a great deal, the workman, no matter how willing he may be to do so, cannot protect himself.

The world cannot do without asbestos at the present time as it

forms an essential component in many sophisticated engineering production and everyday devices. Without asbestos, more life would undoubtedly be lost from the hazards of fire and most kinds of energy conservation, transportation and industry would be unable to function effectively.

## References

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