



PUTTING TOGETHER THE PIECES

A Guide for Mesothelioma
Patients and Their Families

— A WHITE PAPER PRESENTED BY —

RPWB

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A Guide for Mesothelioma Patients and Their Families

The ads run repeatedly on television and jam the internet. Because of them, nearly everyone has a general understanding that asbestos exposure has been linked to mesothelioma. Even so, after a diagnosis of mesothelioma, the number of pieces needed to put together the medical and legal puzzle can seem overwhelming.

For some patients, the source of the asbestos exposure is quite clear based on their occupation. For others, it is more of a mystery. Because seemingly small amounts of exposure can be enough to cause the disease, we've worked on cases linked to long-forgotten internships, part-time summer jobs and even years spent washing a husband's work clothes.





In this white paper, we seek to provide context to this insidious disease and answer some of the questions we are often asked by mesothelioma patients and their families.



WHAT IS MESOTHELIOMA?

Mesothelioma is a rare type of cancer that attacks the lining of major organs.

THE FOUR MAIN TYPES ARE:

	Malignant pleural mesothelioma — cancer in the pleura/lining of the lungs and the chest cavity (in some cases, it can progress into the lungs themselves). This is, by far, the most common type of mesothelioma.
	Peritoneal mesothelioma — cancer in the peritoneum, the membrane surrounding organs in the abdomen (extremely rare, with fewer than 500 cases diagnosed each year) ¹
	Pericardial mesothelioma — cancer in the pericardium, the thin membrane that lines the heart (also rare)
	Testicular mesothelioma — cancer in the membrane lining the testicles (also rare)

MORE THAN
3,000

Each year, more than 3,000 people in the United States are diagnosed with malignant pleural mesothelioma (MPM). The disease is most common in older people. The average age at diagnosis is 69.² This is due to the lengthy latency period between exposure to asbestos and diagnosis with mesothelioma. Because asbestos products continue to be used to this day, it is a sad fact that many more people will be diagnosed with mesothelioma in the coming decades.³

Is It Curable?

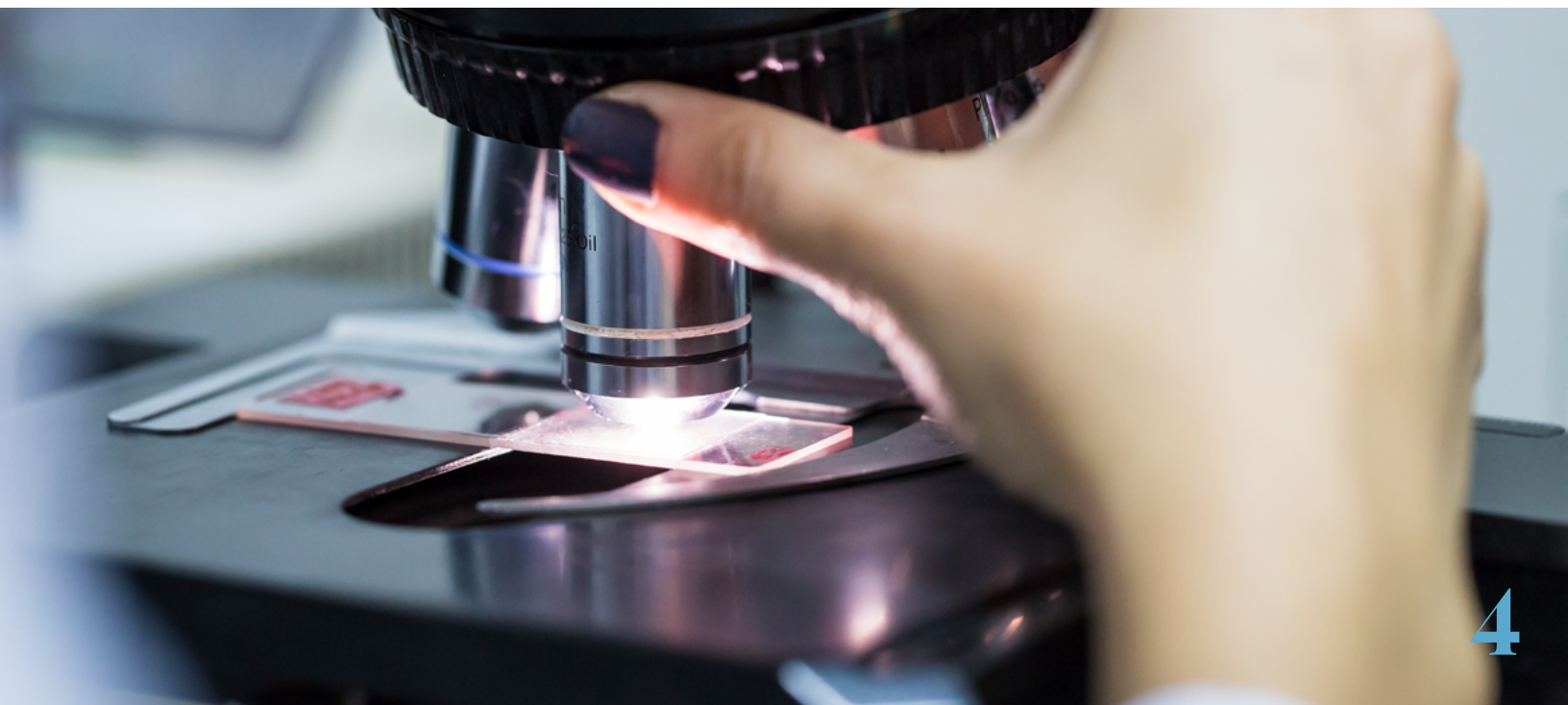
Unfortunately, there is currently no cure for mesothelioma. The prognosis for those with MPM is poor, mainly due to the late stage at which the disease is usually detected. Most victims survive less than a year.

While there remains no cure, advances in mesothelioma research have led to earlier diagnosis of the disease and better treatment options for patients that may lead to longer life expectancies and a better quality of life.

The Path From Diagnosis to Treatment: What Are the Options?

The most common symptom of mesothelioma is shortness of breath. Initially, some patients describe lingering flu-or cold-like symptoms such as exhaustion, a cough and becoming easily winded. Chest X-rays often show a mass or fluid in the lungs that could be mistaken for pneumonia or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) at first glance. A referral to a specialist usually follows.

A biopsy with tissue staining is the only way to confirm a diagnosis. No blood tests have been approved to diagnose mesothelioma.



Is Surgery an Option?

Unlike lung cancer, mesothelioma can affect many areas and the degree of thickening/damage can vary. This means that surgery often goes beyond simply removing one mass. MRI, CT and PET scans will often be used to determine the size and location of a tumor, its involvement with the lymph nodes, and the progression of the disease.

Surgery combined with chemotherapy and radiation may lead to remission for some patients. For others, a surgical procedure may be palliative to reduce pain or address fluid buildup to ease symptoms.

You should look for a physician who routinely sees patients with this form of cancer. The right team of oncologists and nurses will be able to explain whether surgery is a good option for your unique medical history and illness level.



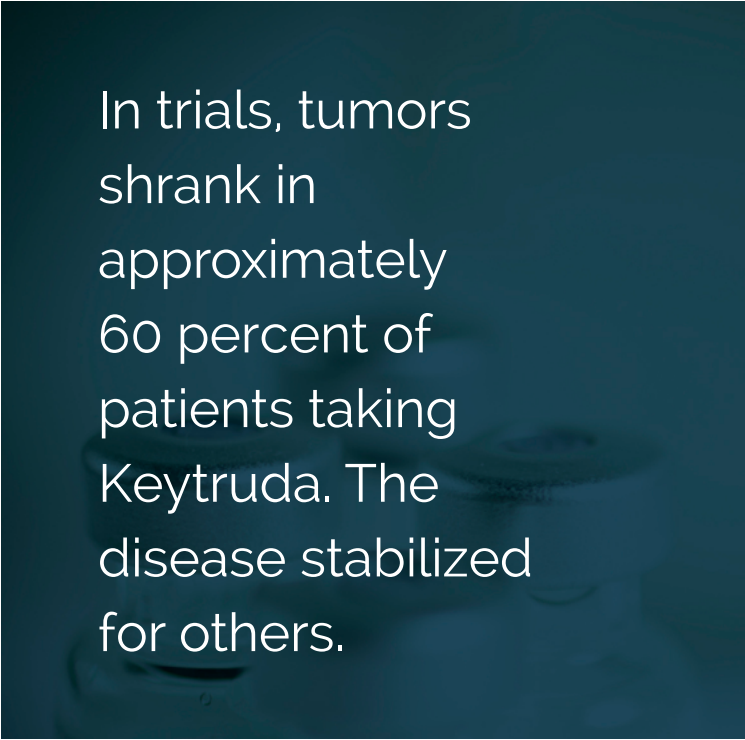
How Are Treatment Options Advancing?

Each region in the U.S. has well-regarded treatment centers that focus on mesothelioma. Some are conducting research and enrolling patients in clinical trials for experimental treatments.

For example, the Mesothelioma Treatment Center at Baylor College of Medicine's Lung Institute has been investigating how combinations of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation may improve outcomes for patients with MPM. One treatment option being explored there is to deliver chemotherapy to the site of the tumor during surgery. Another recent trial is looking at whether a combination of cancer drugs (Cisplatin and Pemetrexed) is more effective than individual medications at fighting mesothelioma. These examples are only two of the many clinical trials underway at institutions across the country.

Another facet of research is the development of better drugs

to treat the disease. One in particular, Keytruda, has shown promising results. It was originally developed for non-small cell lung cancer, but has proven effective at treating MPM as well. In trials, tumors shrank in approximately 60 percent of patients taking this medication⁴ The disease stabilized the cancer for others.⁵



In trials, tumors shrank in approximately 60 percent of patients taking Keytruda. The disease stabilized for others.

Though not a cure, the drug is offering [extra time and improving quality of life](#) during that time. Research continues to lead to treatments that offer better outcomes.

What Causes Mesothelioma?

The only definitive cause of mesothelioma in the U.S. is asbestos exposure. Occupational exposure to asbestos was common from the 1940s into the 1980s based on the widespread use of asbestos in industrial and commercial applications.

The human body has a variety of defense mechanisms that help the respiratory system clear many common irritants. Asbestos fibers, however, are structured in a way that makes them uniquely able to get past the body's defense systems. Asbestos fibers are long, thin and too small to be seen with the naked eye. Because of their structure, asbestos fibers are able to make their way to the alveoli in the lungs, where gas exchange takes place. Asbestos fibers can be deposited in the alveoli, where they can cause scarring and, eventually, cell mutations that can lead to the development of cancer.

Annual deaths attributed to mesothelioma are increasing for people 85 and older. This is because of the lengthy latency period (at least 10 years, but up to 50 years from exposure) for the disease to develop. But deaths of people 55 and younger indicate that many continue to experience occupational and environmental exposure even as regulations issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have sought to limit asbestos exposure.⁶

AFTER EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS IT MAY TAKE





10 TO 50 YEARS

BEFORE SYMPTOMS OF MESOTHELIOMA DEVELOP

What Is Asbestos?



Asbestos is a group of six naturally occurring fibrous minerals. Three types of asbestos, chrysotile, amosite and crocidolite, came into wide use in many industries and products around the turn of the 20th century. Thousands of products contained asbestos, some well into the 1980s, including pipe coverings, cements, gaskets, shingles, insulation, wire, electrical panels, brake linings and clutches. Asbestos has unique properties that made it attractive, including:

	It will not burn even at extreme temperatures, making it a good insulator.
	It is flexible, but has a higher tensile strength than steel and can be woven into cloth.
	It doesn't conduct electricity and won't heat up when exposed to an electrical current.
	Some forms are chemically inert and resistant to a wide range of caustic chemicals and acids.

Additionally, other commercially important minerals such as talc and vermiculite may have been contaminated with asbestos.





Where Could You Have Been Exposed to Asbestos?

If you, a spouse or a parent worked in certain industrial settings, there was a greater risk of asbestos exposure. Some of these include:

- Steel, aluminum, brass and other metal mills
- Foundries
- Power plants
- Refineries
- Chemical plants
- Paper mills
- Textile mills
- Navy and civilian ships and shipyards

In industrial settings, asbestos was used in a wide range of products, including:

- Gaskets and packing
- Pipe and block insulation
- Cements
- Specialty piping
- Transite boards and sheets
- Drywall joint compounds
- Refractory products

Asbestos was also widely used in residential and commercial construction products such as asbestos siding, roofing materials, insulation, cement pipes, floor tiles, drywall joint compound and even caulk. It was also used in automotive products such as brake linings, clutches and certain gaskets.

Heavier exposure over a longer term increases the risk of developing an asbestos-related disease, but secondhand and very short-term exposures have been shown to

cause mesothelioma as well. Occupations with high potential for asbestos exposure include:

- Pipefitters
- Maintenance mechanics
- Plumbers
- Boilermakers
- Machinists
- Electricians
- Construction workers
- Sheet metal workers
- Auto mechanics
- Firefighters or emergency responders exposed to asbestos-laden insulation (the collapse of the World Trade Center towers released tons of asbestos into the air)



A recent study was able to identify the industry and occupation of many who had died of pleural mesothelioma in 23 states and found that the shipbuilding/repair and construction industries were major contributors to mesothelioma deaths.⁷ Direct and indirect asbestos exposure was common with construction trades, accounting for 70 to 80 percent of asbestos consumption historically.

Because asbestos fibers become airborne, exposure was not limited to those who worked directly with asbestos-containing products. Supervisors, engineers, quality control workers and many others who worked in the vicinity of those working directly with asbestos products were frequently exposed to asbestos as well and mesothelioma occurs among those who were bystanders to asbestos work. Additionally, those exposed to asbestos on the job may have worn their asbestos-laden work clothes home, where they were then laundered

by their spouses or children. Mesothelioma is known to occur in those who washed asbestos-contaminated clothing.

Figuring out when and where exposure occurred can be a challenge. Here are some starting points that may help jog memories:

- Social Security records may remind you of long-ago short-term jobs or internships.
- Resources exist for Navy veterans, including what asbestos products were used on particular vessels.
- Subpoenas of past employers — for example, a paper mill or metal plating factory — can uncover what products were used for boilers, pumps and valves.

Co-workers, spouses and family members can often help complete the picture and fill in missing details.

What Are Your Legal Rights?

The law holds manufacturers responsible for dangers posed by their products that they know or should know about. It also holds companies responsible for producing unreasonably dangerous products. The dangers of asbestos were known in the early 1900s and medical and industrial hygiene articles detailing the hazards of asbestos were published beginning in the 1920s and 1930s. Companies that manufactured, sold or used products that contained asbestos knew or should have known about the dangers of asbestos as far back as the 1930s and 1940s, yet these companies continued to use asbestos in their products without warning or protecting workers.

A diagnosis of mesothelioma can inflict both economic (loss of income and costs of medical care) and noneconomic damage (pain and suffering and loss of companionship) on you and your family. Pursuing legal action can help lift the financial burden and provide security for loved ones

into the future.

The legal system allows you to go to court to seek justice from solvent makers of asbestos products. Claims against some companies may also be made without the necessity of bringing suit. Several companies have gone through bankruptcy and claims against those companies may be paid out of trust funds set up as part of the bankruptcy estate to compensate asbestos victims.

State workers' compensation laws may provide another remedy. A current or former employer may be required to cover related medical expenses. Retired and former military members may be able to pursue disability claims.

Victims have limited time to pursue legal remedies after being diagnosed with mesothelioma. It is critical to speak with an experienced attorney to make sure you do not lose the right to seek monetary compensation or overlook available avenues for recovery.

**THERE IS NO
TIME TO WASTE.**

What Is Important When Selecting an Attorney to Evaluate Your Case?

You need to seek counsel from a law firm that routinely handles mesothelioma cases and has the experience and knowledge to properly investigate and develop your case. The firm you choose needs to have significant experience developing work and exposure histories to ensure that you and your family receive full and fair compensation. This could mean determining which of 50 job sites and 80 products exposed a 78-year-old grandfather who worked a long career as a union pipefitter. Or it might mean tracking exposure to a summer job in college at an industrial plating mill that preceded a career as an executive. The firm you choose must have the experience to leave no stone unturned in your case.



The firm you choose should have a long record of litigating mesothelioma cases and a proven record of success. Since the 1970s, the attorneys of RPWB have established a long legacy of successfully protecting the rights of asbestos victims and their families. Our attorneys have decades of experience representing mesothelioma victims and as a nationwide law firm, we have handled cases in nearly every state. Our asbestos attorneys have spent years helping asbestos victims piece together the puzzle of their asbestos exposure and the companies responsible for that exposure.

Experts play a vital role in these cases. They analyze and put occupational exposure into context. One way they do this is through industrial hygiene tests that can quantify the level of exposure. Law firms that focus on asbestos litigation have developed the relationships with experts that are needed to build the strongest case possible.

Lastly, the law firm you select must be respectful and compassionate enough to ensure that legal issues do not disrupt medical care.

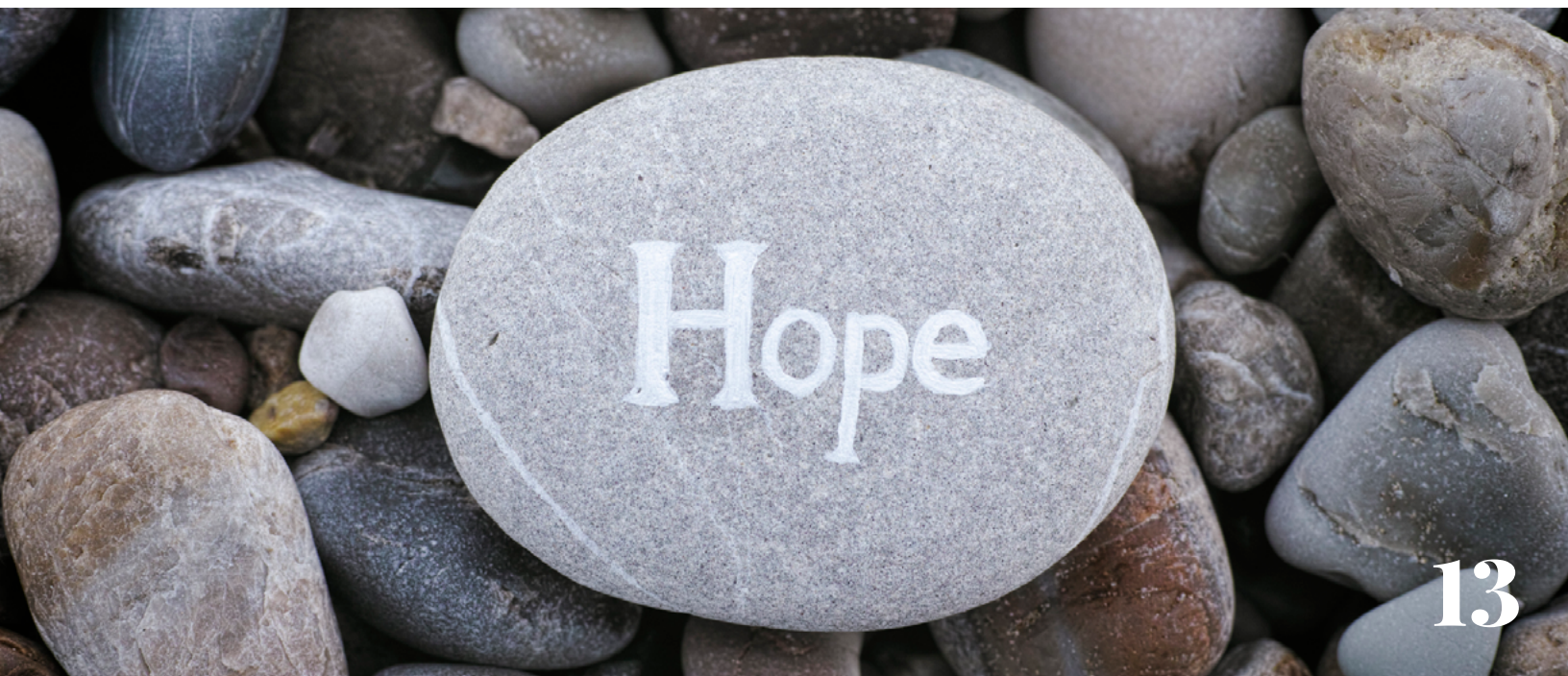
Resources for Families Coping With Diagnoses

Many resources exist for families as they make difficult medical decisions. The National Cancer Institute has a booklet, "[When Someone You Love Is Being Treated for Cancer](#)," that provides good background information.

Because mesothelioma is relatively rare, many patients struggle to find others who have been through a similar experience. The Mesothelioma Applied Research Foundation developed [MesoConnect](#) as a way to help build a support network. The program offers connections

with those who know what it is like to care for a loved one with mesothelioma.

This is only an introduction to some of the issues that arise for patients diagnosed with mesothelioma and their families. Mesothelioma is a life-changing diagnosis for both patients and their families. Take action right away. Learn about your legal rights, how best to plan for the future and what resources are available. It is important to protect your family from significant financial burdens related to the disease and to provide a continuation of care for your loved ones after the disease runs its course.



Sources

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4 Merck Newsroom, "[Updated KEYTRUDA Data in Small Cell Lung Cancer and Mesothelioma Presented at 17th World Conference
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6 "[Malignant Mesothelioma Mortality – United States, 1999 – 2015](#)," Mazurek, Jacek, et al.

7 Id.



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