



**Unite response to the National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI)  
consultation on allocation of research funding for asbestos-related  
diseases**

This response is submitted by Unite the Union. Unite is the UK's largest trade union with 1.6 million members working in the private and public sectors. The union's members work in a wide range of industries including agriculture, forestry, horticulture, docks, construction, manufacturing, food manufacturing distribution and retail, financial services, road, rail, air and sea transport, print, media, not for profit sectors, local government, private contractors providing public services, education and the health service. Our members work in some of the most dangerous industries which include agriculture, construction and docks.

Unite makes it a very high priority to raise awareness about the dangers of asbestos and also supports many members who have unfortunately developed asbestos related diseases in making compensation claims. We continue to campaign for the restoration of compensation to those who have developed pleural plaques. Unite also strongly supports the awareness raising work being done by the HSE's 'Silent Killer' campaign and believe that HSE is the most appropriate body to do this work.

Unite has the following suggestions to make though we are very aware that this funding is limited and priorities will need to be set.

Given the limited amount of money available generally for asbestos disease research, and the uncertainty about future funding, we would like to see the £3 million, phased over three years, devoted solely to mesothelioma research.

**1. The establishment of a national network/centre for asbestos research in line with the concept of a National Centre for Asbestos Related Disease (NCARD):** Unite supports the campaign to establish a National Centre for Asbestos Related Disease. The campaign has attracted cross-party political support and was instrumental in attracting funds now available through the ABI. The campaign demonstrated the importance of a national centre or organisation dedicated to asbestos research, with an identifiable 'badge', which would comprise those leading the field in asbestos research, with international research links, and capable of attracting funds.

Unite believes that funds should be allocated for setting up such an organisation which may evolve from, or be a part of, an existing research body. Unite is convinced of the need for such a body.

## **2. Palliative Care**

Dr. Helen Clayson, the founder of the Barrow Asbestos-Related Disease Support has made a compelling argument for research into palliative care. We understand that Dr. Clayson has provided information on proposals for research into palliative care for mesothelioma patients. We support Dr. Clayson's proposals for such research and ask that the NIRC gives serious consideration to Dr. Clayson's proposals.

## **3. Developing a grant application to the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)**

The NIHR have said that they would welcome a grant application for mesothelioma research. If this were done, it may be possible to tie into a major source of research funding. Funds would be needed to develop a serious and well structured grant application for mesothelioma research and we feel that this would be an effective use of money now available.

## **4. PIT - A Phase III Trial of Prophylactic Irradiation of Tracts in Patients with Malignant Pleural Mesothelioma Following Invasive Chest Wall Intervention (PB-PG-0909-20242)**

Unite would support a proposal for funding a trial to determine whether prophylactic radiotherapy is effective for mesothelioma patients who have undergone an invasive biopsy. We believe that the burden of this radiotherapy treatment is underestimated both in terms of time-consuming hospital appointments and excessive travelling. Patients with such a very short life expectancy should not be subjected to routine treatment which may not be effective.

## **5. The establishment of a bio-bank**

We are aware that internationally researchers have called for the establishment of bio-banks in areas of very high exposure to asbestos to provide information for collaborative research.

The UK has the highest incidence of mesothelioma world-wide, where there are clusters of very high incidence of asbestos disease, particularly in areas where ship building and dock work were undertaken.

We can see the value of such a resource for research, as it will not only provide national data but also information for international research. At the same time we do have some concerns about this as the main drive behind that would be to develop a blood test that would discover mesothelioma in future victims much earlier than could be achieved by using methods available at present. At present it would be hard to see the benefit of this for victims as mesothelioma is incurable, therefore finding out earlier may cause some distress to victims and their families.

So we would support this idea only if it encourages development of treatments that will be beneficial on earlier diagnosis.

Unite thanks the NCRI for the opportunity to respond to this consultation.

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