

Malignant Mesothelioma: Experience at the Singapore General Hospital

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Abstract

Introduction: Malignant mesothelioma is a rare occupational disease in Singapore. There have been few reports of this condition in Singapore. We aim to describe the clinical characteristics, management and outcomes in a case series of 16 patients diagnosed in a teaching hospital in Singapore. **Materials and Methods:** A chart review of all cases of malignant mesothelioma diagnosed in our institution during the period 1996 to 2001 was conducted, with particular attention to the occupational history. **Results:** There were 16 patients (15 male patients) with a median age of 61.5 (range, 46 to 78) years. Thirteen patients had malignant pleural mesothelioma (MPM) and 3 patients had mesothelioma of the peritoneum. Eleven of the patients with MPM (84.6%) presented with a pleural effusion and only 2 patients (15.4%) had chest pain. Initial pleural fluid cytology and closed pleural biopsies were negative in all patients who presented with a pleural effusion. Thoracoscopy confirmed the histologic diagnosis and allowed simultaneous talc pleurodesis in 9 patients. All patients had documented asbestos exposure, of which 14 (87.5%) were confirmed to be occupationally related. The median time from first exposure to symptoms was 33.5 (range, 16 to 53) years. The median survival was 6 months. Most of the patients (75%) received best supportive care alone. **Conclusions:** In our experience, malignant mesothelioma is an aggressive disease with a poor prognosis. It is strongly associated with asbestos exposure. Thoracoscopy is an invaluable diagnostic modality in the evaluation of a patient with occupational asbestos exposure and an undiagnosed pleural effusion.

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