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Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum - UK

Call for government funding for mesothelioma research centre.

Mesothelioma sufferers will gather on Friday, February 27 to call for the government to invest millions in research to treat the devastating asbestos related disease, Mesothelioma is the least researched of the top twenty cancers.

On Action Mesothelioma Day on Friday 27th February mesothelioma sufferers, their families and friends, MPs and doctors and nurses will gather in cities throughout the UK. www.asbestosforum.org

They will release doves as an act of remembrance of all those who have died from the disease and as a sign of hope for all current and future mesothelioma sufferers.

They will call on the government to provide funding for a National Centre for Asbestos Related Disease to keep the UK in line with other western countries. In Australia the Government has provided \$6.2 million Australian Dollars to fund a National Centre for Asbestos Related Disease. Sufferers are asking the UK government to match this funding - around £5 – 10 million - to provide a similar centre here.

On the 27th February, an international conference will discuss advances in the treatment of mesothelioma. John Edwards: Consultant Thoracic Surgeon and Chair of the British Mesothelioma Interest Group speaking at the conference says: *“Researchers are desperate for funds to develop life saving treatments – mesothelioma is far and away the least researched of the top twenty cancers in the UK. Funding for a UK National Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases is a priority. Such a virtual institution would encourage collaboration between current and future researchers and stimulate trans national research to generate future treatments to prolong and save lives.”*

John Willett, who suffers from mesothelioma says:

“As far as I am concerned, the Government, which was my employer, has signed my death warrant. Government, employers, and the enforcement agencies failed

to protect myself and thousands of others from exposure to asbestos. The very least they can do now is to support research into this terrible disease.”

Tony Whitston: Chair - Asbestos Victims Support Groups Forum - UK

“In the US, mesothelioma has been given research priority to bid for mesothelioma research projects from the defense research budget in recognition of the thousands of veterans exposed to asbestos in service and in naval shipyards. In Australia, the government has given \$6 million to fund a research centre. Society has a moral obligation to stand by those who have lost their health and their lives in creating this country’s wealth.”

For interviews with mesothelioma sufferers and more information about the events on Action Mesothelioma Day go to www.asbestosforum.org and contact: Tony Whitston: 0161 636 7555 or 07748189837

For information about mesothelioma research contact Mr John Edwards, Consultant Thoracic Surgeon: 0114 226 9279 or 07970 833973
john.edwards@sth.nhs.uk

Notes for Editors

1. Action Mesothelioma Day was inaugurated by the British Lung Foundation and supporting organisations to raise awareness of mesothelioma and to generate support for an Action Mesothelioma Charter.
2. Mesothelioma is an invariably fatal tumour found mainly in the pleura (surface lining of the lung cavity), for which there is no cure. Average life expectancy is approximately 9 months. 2,039 people died from mesothelioma in 2005. Six people die from mesothelioma every day. Estimated 5-year survival rate is less than 5%. At least 70,000 British people will develop mesothelioma in the next 30-40 years from past exposure to asbestos. In women, it is the cancer most rapidly increasing in incidence.
3. The Commonwealth Government of Australia has given \$6.2 million to fund their research centre and a further \$1 million has been donated by the research centre host, the University of Western Australia.
4. The UK and Australia have the highest internationally reported incidence rates (30 per million) for mesothelioma, yet in the UK almost all funds dedicated to mesothelioma research come from families and friends of mesothelioma sufferers. Very little funding comes from government.

5. John Edwards, Consultant Thoracic Surgeon, along with fellow health professionals, mesothelioma patients' support groups and Michael Clapham MP, Chair All Party Asbestos Sub-Committee, is leading the proposal for the National Centre for Asbestos Related Diseases. The Development Group have wide support and have met the Prime Minister's special advisor on health in Downing Street, the National Director for Cancer and the Minister for Health with responsibility for cancer.