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The Military Mesothelioma Experience Study (MiMES)

Background

Mesothelioma is one of the most challenging of cancers. It is incurable nature, and has an extreme symptom burden. It is linked to asbestos exposure, normally 15-40 years prior to diagnosis. Little evidence is available on the health and support needs of veterans with mesothelioma.

Aim

The Military Mesothelioma Experience Study (MiMES) aims to identify the care and support needs of UK veterans with mesothelioma from the perspective of veterans, family carers, health professionals and support agency staff.

Methods

Participants were purposively recruited via trusted charities and support groups. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 veterans with mesothelioma and 9 carers. Participants were from all three services (army, navy and air force) and had a varied work history whilst in the forces and after. Time served ranged from 2 to 26 years. Thematic Analysis techniques were used to identify key themes.

Results

The findings provide unique insight into the nature of asbestos exposure whilst in the armed forces, participants' diagnostic experiences, and their support and care needs. The relationship between military culture, people's responses to a diagnosis of mesothelioma and their associated navigation of health, financial and military services is considered. Key issues are preferences regarding information provision and coping for both the person with mesothelioma and the family carer. Valued sources of information and support included specialist mesothelioma health professionals as well as mesothelioma/asbestos charities. Steering a course through the disparate requirements of civil and military claims systems can be problematic.

Conclusion

This is the first study that examines the impact of military culture on how veterans respond to the diagnosis and how they navigate services. The implications the findings have for improving service provision, care and support for these patients are identified.