The psychological effects of mesothelioma in the UK military context from the carer's perspective

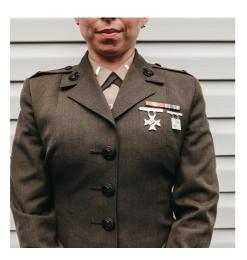
Virginia Sherborne¹, Angela Tod¹ & Bethany Taylor¹

¹ Mesothelioma UK Research Centre, Division of Nursing & Midwifery Health Sciences School, The University of Sheffield, UK



Introduction

Mesothelioma is an incurable asbestos-related cancer with a high symptom burden. Risk of asbestos exposure to Armed Forces personnel has been identified, e.g., from ships' boiler rooms and damaged buildings. Mesothelioma's long lead time means cases in the military context tend to be amongst veterans. Research shows British veterans and their families are likely to have particular needs regarding accessing health services and support. Research into the lived experience of mesothelioma patients is sparse, with resulting lack of awareness of the psychosocial impact, on carers as well as patients. This study explored the psychological effects of mesothelioma in the UK military context from the carer's perspective.



Methods

This qualitative study involved:

 a secondary data analysis (SDA) of interview data from the Military Mesothelioma Experience Study
six semi-structured interviews (September 2020-March 2021) with family carers of UK veterans with mesothelioma
interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Contact Details:

Virginia Sherborne, PhD student at the Mesothelioma UK Research Centre

Email: hvsherborne1@sheffield.ac.uk

Twitter: @meso_sheffield

Website: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/murc

Findings

The findings provide insight into the psychological impact on veterans and their carers. Themes developed included 'Going the extra mile'; 'Staying the same person'; 'Needing to know'. Military culture impacted both patients and carers.

See Table 1 for a summary of themes developed.

Table 1: Summary of themes

Stage of study	Super-ordinate themes	Subordinate themes
Secondary data analysis	Control and responsibility	The chain of command
		Controlling language and thinking
		The out-of-control body
		The proactive carer
	Openness: is it safe?	Secrecy and intimacy
		Official secrets
		Becoming vulnerable
	Human connections: getting support	(No subthemes)
Main interview study	Going the extra mile	Just keeping on going
		Expecting and receiving committed back-up
	Staying the same person	The recognisable patient
		The recognisable carer
	Needing to know	Choosing what to share
		Information exchange and professionals
		Raising awareness

Conclusions

Issues highlighted include:

- military veterans' and their carers' responses to pain from a terminal illness
- reluctance to show perceived weakness and ask for help affecting both patients and carers
- moral injury relating to carers' interactions with the MOD and the NHS



The authors declare no conflicting interests. This project was funded by Mesothelioma UK as part of a portfolio of research conducted by the Mesothelioma UK Research Centre – Sheffield (MURC). The MURC is an alliance between the Mesothelioma UK and the University of Sheffield. The views expressed are those of the author(s), and not necessarily those of Mesothelioma UK or University of Sheffield.