PROJECT: Data collection of asbestos exposure information for the Australian Mesothelioma Registry

CLIENT: Cancer Institute, NSW

TYPE: CATI telephone survey – specially trained interviewing team conducted sensitive interviews using OccIDEAS online occupational exposure assessment system

PROJECT OVERVIEW
Cancer Institute NSW (CINSW) is charged with improving cancer control through the NSW Cancer Plan. A major program of the Plan involves the development and management of the Australian Mesothelioma Registry (AMR). From 1 July 2010, the AMR has collected information about all new cases of mesothelioma throughout Australia and information about occupational and environmental exposure to asbestos.

HRF’s highly experienced interviewers were required to conduct interviews sensitively with, at times, extremely ill respondents. The quality of the research lead to the current contract with the Cancer Institute being extended for another three years to July 2016.

HRF’S INVOLVEMENT IN THE PROJECT
The Monash Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health (MonCOEH) developed an exposure assessment instrument based on the OccIDEAS expert exposure assessment system. The instrument was used by the HRF to collect the necessary occupational and environmental exposure information for transfer to the AMR.

Data from the patient’s job history calendar is entered by CINSW and used by MonCOEH to determine the job-specific modules (JSM) of the exposure assessment instrument a patient needs to complete. Following this, contact details and a list of the JSMs for each patient are sent to the HRF on a weekly basis by CINSW. Patients who have consented to be contacted are phoned by a trained HRF interviewer (within a week of receipt of patient extract) to complete a telephone interview, a large portion of which requires online access to the OccIDEAS website. The telephone interview seeks some general information about each patient, details of any exposure to asbestos in the general environment and details of job-specific exposure to asbestos.
HOW DID HRF DELIVER GREAT RESULTS FOR THE PROJECT

This job requires highly experienced interviewers who are able to conduct interviews sensitively with extremely ill respondents. Some interviews are conducted with the assistance of a proxy or an interpreter and can be long and difficult.

HRF interviewers have also had to learn how to use the OccIDEAS instrument as a pseudo CATI and to capture archaic or unique exposure situations not included in the JSMs. Due to the excellent work of the HRF interviewers, the current contract with the Cancer Institute has been extended for another three years to July 2016.

HOW THE RESEARCH PROJECT MADE A DIFFERENCE

Data collection for the project is still ongoing but the report from phase 1 (2010 to 2013) is available at http://www.mesothelioma-australia.com/publications-and-data/publications

The information collected by HRF is being used to:

- better understand the exact relationship between asbestos exposure and mesothelioma
- better understand the nature and levels of asbestos exposure that can result in mesothelioma
- identify the groups of workers exposed to potentially dangerous levels of asbestos and to prevent that exposure
- assist the development of policies to best deal with the asbestos still present in our environment (mainly our built environment)
- provide information to assist in preventing mesothelioma in the future
- identify other potential exposures that may cause mesothelioma.

CLIENT’S REACTION

“I’ve just today noticed the quality of the comments left by the interviewers, recording relevant information provided by the patients over and above their JSM answers. This information is potentially very useful both for the exposure assessment but also for adding to our knowledge of unusual or archaic exposure situations. Getting this info down so accurately is a considerable achievement given that the interviewers aren’t trained hygienists or exposure experts (although it looks like they’re rapidly becoming experts!). Please pass on my thanks and congratulations to the interviewers for this ongoing effort.” Comments from Monash Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health staff

WHAT TO KNOW MORE?

Shanthi Ramanathan Head, Client Research P (02) 4041 5515 E shanthi@hrf.com.au