



MEDIA STATEMENT

Sharp Rise in Asbestos-Related Cancer Claims

The Asbestos Relief Trust has reported a sharp increase in the severity of disease among claimants.

Speaking at the AGM today, the chairman, Mr John Doidge, said that 66% of all claims accepted by the trust in the past financial year were for mesothelioma, a fatal cancer of the pleura or peritoneum. In the early years of the trust, which was formed in 2003, less than 10% of claims were for mesothelioma.

Although in line with predictions, the increase has resulted in a shift of priorities for the trust.

“Average compensation payments by the trust to claimants are now much higher because of the increased severity. We must take steps to preserve our remaining capital as mesothelioma has a latency period of up to 40 years and we must anticipate the needs of future claimants. There is also an increased urgency to diagnose and settle claims because of the poor prognosis for living claimants,” said Doidge. “

Doidge said that the ART had paid out 136 claims amounting to R16,7 million in the financial year ended February. Since inception 3893 claims to the value of R266.8 million had been paid. The trust had received, screened and assessed a total of 16 425 enquiries.

Discussing the highlights of the past year, he indicated that the trust had allocated R508 000 to social projects that have a link to asbestos. These included the community-based Asbestos Interest Group, the International Mesothelioma Interest Group Conference, which is being held in Cape Town in October 2014, and the ongoing provision of a palliative care service in Kuruman.

In her presentation the palliative care nurse, Sister Phemelo Magabanyane, said that in the absence of a hospice service, she had provided palliative care and portable oxygen concentrators to a number of mesothelioma sufferers as these were not available from public hospitals. She had also initiated a number of activities to build community awareness on the dangers of asbestos.

Doidge said the ART had also reintroduced the Professor Neil White bursary, a two year R100 000 bursary, which is jointly funded by the Asbestos Relief Trust and the Kgalagadi Relief Trust. The aim of the bursary is to up-skill doctors in the early diagnosis of occupational lung diseases so as to enable former mineworkers to access both compensation and treatment. The bursary was awarded to Dr TG Anizoba, a Kuruman doctor who works extensively with former asbestos miners and their families.

Doidge urged miners who had previously lodged an unsuccessful claim with the trust to go for regular medical check-ups as provided for by the State. If they contract an asbestos related disease they should contact the Trust again to see if they qualify for compensation. Similarly, successful claimants whose disease had progressed to an asbestos cancer should contact the trust again to see if they qualified for additional compensation.

For further information, potential claimants and interested parties can visit the re-launched website on www.asbestostrust.co.za.

For further comment contact Tina da Cruz on 011 482 1000.

17 September 2014