Preventing baker’s asthma

Dear Sir

Dr Smith’s paper on the prevention of baker’s asthma made interesting reading. It demonstrated a thoughtful approach to the protection of workers’ health that appeared to produce good results.

The structured interview conducted as part of the ‘further assessment’ of an exposed employee who gave a positive response to the annual questionnaire was thorough. It included questions about improvement of symptoms away from work as well as about symptoms more obviously associated with work. Of course, this is an important point to make as work-relatedness might only be suggested once improvements are perceived by the employee after fairly long breaks from exposure.

Such a question on improvement away from work should also be included in the annual questionnaire (effectively a screening questionnaire). The paper stated that those who reported a ‘history of symptoms which arise solely at work or are worse at work’ are referred for the further assessment. This approach could miss employees who need further assessment but who do not pass these entry criteria.

I assume that exposed employees are encouraged to report respiratory symptoms at any time, i.e. not just during administration of the annual questionnaire. Someone could develop symptoms soon after the last annual questionnaire was completed and these might not be noted until the next periodic questionnaire.

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References