LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Cadmium, arsenic and lung cancer: the bigger picture

Dear Sir,

It would not have been reasonable for me to conclude on the basis of one small study [1] ‘that arsenic acts as a late stage carcinogen’ although Park and Stayner [2] state this to be my conclusion. In fact I concluded that the new findings (lung cancer standardized mortality ratios declining with period from ceasing arsenic exposure) were consistent with such a hypothesis. To some readers, such differences in wording may seem slight and inconsequential, but overconfidence in epidemiological interpretation is to be avoided because it is so easy to be wrong.

Drs Park and Stayner ignore the bigger picture. There have been occupational cancers in former workers at the US Globe cadmium recovery plant. Was it due to cadmium exposure, arsenic exposure or both? My recent short report mirrored similar findings reported previously for workers from the UK Capper Pass tin smelter [3,4]. What is now needed is a simultaneous analysis of lung cancer risks in relation to both recent and distant cadmium and arsenic exposures at the Globe plant. It will be important to let the data speak and not design an analysis that assumes in advance which of these variables is important. An even-handed investigation should, however, assist in answering the bigger question posed previously.

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References


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