

KOREAN GOVERNMENT SEEKS ADVICE FROM ADRI

The international reputation of the Asbestos Diseases Research Institute at Concord Hospital continues to grow, with the most recent visitors being a high-level delegation from the Korean Government.

ADRI Director, Professor Nico van Zandwijk, welcomed the group recently by praising Korea as one of the few nations, which along with Australia, has placed a total ban on the use of asbestos.

The Korean delegation included senior staff from the Prime Minister's office, and from the Ministries of the Environment, Health and Welfare, and Employment and Labor, along with medical scientists from Korean research centres.

Prof van Zandwijk told the visitors that while Australia this year could expect 750 new cases of deadly mesothelioma caused by exposure to asbestos, the developing world was yet to confront this medical crisis.



“More than 10,000 cases of asbestos linked cancer can be expected in China each year,” he told them.

“In the coming decade it is likely there will be more than 100,000 cases in China, and India will have a similar problem.

“Unfortunately malignant mesothelioma is not always recognised in developing countries.”

It was exposure to asbestos, resulting in malignant mesothelioma, that eventually killed health activist Bernie Banton, after whom the ADRI at Concord is named.

In the two years since the Institute was opened, more than 25 scientific papers have been published by research staff, and Prof van Zandwijk told the Korean delegation he welcomed the opportunity to exchange ideas and information.

“One of the most important things that we must do in Australia and in Korea is to educate the general public about the dangers of asbestos,” he said.

“Education and prevention are essential, especially when people are attempting home renovations themselves, unaware that asbestos products may be present.”

Prof van Zandwijk explained to the Korean delegation that an early and significant achievement at ADRI was the establishment of a national registry of patients, with a focus on their work and environment histories, together with a biobank of frozen tissue and blood samples. He said these would allow researchers at ADRI to develop drugs, identify disease pathways, and find ways to manipulate asbestos caused cancers.