

Irina Sirobaba

O.V. Nashivanko, scientific supervisor and language assistant is
SE «Dnepropetrovsk Medical Academy of Health Ministry of Ukraine», Dnipro

Occupational Miners` Diseases

The risk of developing an occupational disease is exceptionally high among miners. Hard coal industry occupies a leading position on the list of occupational disease incidence for all industries while the related morbidity rate is 6-7 times higher than in the whole economy. Mining is not a homogeneous industry since current miners work in formal and informal operations with numerous, and often multiple, airborne exposures. A further occupational health challenge facing primary care practitioners are ex-miners presenting with disease only after long latent period.

The most common cases of occupational diseases among miners include: pulmonary silicosis, an incurable disease that intensifies even after a miner retires and results in death among painful symptoms of respiratory failure; occupational hearing damage, an irreversible injury, worsening with age and depriving miners of the possibility to communicate with others, using speech. This results in acute degradation in the family and the society, denying the affected miner one of the basic values in life; vibration disease, an incurable, painful disorder of the blood vessels, nerves and joints of the upper limbs that deprives patients of sensation in the fingers whose precise movements are impossible. These incurable diseases are most common among hard coal miners. Other occupational diseases contained in the official record are mostly disorders that following appropriate treatment recede without leaving any permanent effects. Among the most characteristic factors related to the miners` occupation are: enormous accident risk; the highest risk of suffering permanent and significant health damage due to occupational diseases; extraordinary physical load resulting in hyper-stress; risk of suffering from the status of psycho-physical burn-out.

Occupational accidents occur twice as often among miners than among other workers, while fatal accidents occur three times as often. It is more probable to be killed working as a miner than participating in a traffic accident.

It is a disturbing fact that the issues relating to health and life protection against unfavorable effects of accidents or exposures connected with underground work receive far less attention from coal mine managers than economic aspects. The miners` lives are still sacrificed for the sake of the primacy of production. Enormous effort is to be made in order to markedly improve this situation. Work Safety and Hygiene inspectors as well as Occupational Medicine employees should obtain appropriate qualifications, however, it seems equally important that the awareness about health and safety issues should be raised among miners as well as all individuals responsible for proper operation of this industrial branch in Ukraine.