

Vietnam war veteran develops rare cancer after exposure to Agent Orange

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A veteran with a rare type of cancer may have developed the condition after being exposed to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War, reveal doctors writing in the journal *BMJ Case Reports*.

The 69-year-old patient was admitted to hospital with a 1-year history of a painful and enlarging mass in his right thigh. Ultrasound and CT scans identified the mass, and a subsequent biopsy confirmed a rare malignant soft tissue cancer, known as pleomorphic liposarcoma.

The cancer was removed during surgery and this was followed by a course of radiotherapy. The patient asked if the tumour was related to his exposure to Agent Orange while serving in the Vietnam War.

From 1963 to 1965, he was in frequent contact with forested areas that were sprayed with Agent Orange, a [toxic chemical](#) aimed at depriving the Viet Cong of crops and vegetation cover.

'Operation Ranch Hand' led to the deposition via helicopter, boats and trucks of 72 million litres of chemicals across the forested and rural areas of Vietnam for this sole purpose. The bulk of these chemicals was Agent Orange which included TCDD—a toxic chemical that has been recognised to have the potential to cause cancer.

Doctors from Sinai Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, USA, say the link between the veteran's cancer and a wartime toxin exposure is possible.

The patient's cancer, pleomorphic liposarcoma, is the rarest type of liposarcoma [cancer](#) and has a high rate of local recurrence and ability to spread to other parts of the body.

"There has been no well-established precipitating factor for liposarcomas," they explain. "However, clinicians should have a high degree of suspicion for persistent and evolving soft tissue masses, especially in patients with a previous military background. This should prompt the search for a possible toxin exposure."

They continue: "The patient was educated about his diagnosis and was counselled about the unfortunate side effects with which Agent Orange has been associated. He continues to be monitored for disease recurrence and will continue to do so for years."

More information: Wartime toxin exposure: recognising the silent killer, casereports.bmj.com/content/2016/bcr-2016-217438

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