## *T Meijster et al. Ann. Occ. Hyg. (2006) Vol.50 p 657 – 664* **Exposure to Antineoplastic Drugs outside the Hospital Environment**

This study of just one kind of medicine, used in a wide variety of settings, highlights the potential for accidental exposure to non-nursing staff, especially those with a low awareness of the potential for contamination of patient skin, clothing and bedding.

Research based in the hospital setting has shown that staff can be exposed to anti-neoplastic drugs through contact with patients, their clothes and bedding. Suspected adverse health effects include reproductive ill-health and cancer.

Evidently other people will come into contact with these drugs e.g. laundry services, care home staff and waste management personnel. The researchers identified eight sectors with potential exposure to antineoplastic drugs: home care, nursing homes, pharmacies, laundries, waste treatment, pharmaceutical industry, veterinary medicine, and universities.

Levels of exposure in these ancillary areas were assessed by collecting and testing gloves, face masks aprons etc. and skin washing where there was no regular use of personal protective equipment.

Large numbers of home care and nursing home staff were found to be exposed to levels that probably exceeded those experienced by oncology nurses. Awareness of the risk is thought to be low in these occupations and protective equipment is seldom employed. For laundry staff the most likely exposure is via inhalation.

## Comment

The degree of risk to home care and nursing home staff cannot be assessed from this study. However, it is clear that protocols are not providing as much protection as would be expected in a hospital setting.

It should be expected that employees will come into contact with drugs which are not fully metabolised and metabolic by products, especially where these are present on the skin of the patient.