
Request for advice

On 30 July 2004 (A&G/W&B/04 53184) the President of the Health Council received the following letter from Mr R Feringa, Director of the Occupational Safety and Health Department at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.

Dear Mr Knottnerus,

The NCvB called attention to the relationship between breast cancer and night shift work in its Monitoring Report on Occupational Diseases in 2002. It was prompted to do so by the publication in 2001 of three occupational epidemiology studies revealing an association between night work and the occurrence of breast carcinoma. Studies were also published in which an increased incidence of this and other forms of cancer was identified among flight attendants.

Melatonin is cited as a possible explanation for the occurrence of breast carcinoma, while a disturbance of cortisol metabolism is regarded as another possibility. The NCvB estimates that one third of the cases of breast cancer in the Netherlands are associated with the performance of shift work.*

I would request that you provide an opinion on the relevance of the relationship between night shift work and breast cancer and the underlying mechanism. If this is not possible on the basis of the exist-

* The report is misquoted here. The correct quotation is: "The NCvB estimates that one third of the cases of breast cancer in women who perform shift work in the Netherlands are associated with the performance of shift work."

ing literature, kindly recommend research that can clarify this issue. I would like to receive your response by 1 March 2005 at the latest.

Yours sincerely,

Director, Occupational Safety and Health Department