

Participatory Action Research: An Investigation Of A Cancer Cluster In An Automotive Parts Plant

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Objective: To (a) use the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach in studying a cluster of cancer cases and (b) investigate possible excess rates of brain cancer, among a group of automotive parts manufacturing plant workers and (c) develop workers' training materials on how to investigate cancer clusters.

Methods: Worker researchers were trained on research methods. Former plant workers participated in hazard mapping in a town hall meeting. The cohort was matched with a Cancer Registry. An opinion survey evaluated workers acceptance of the study.

Results: Five hundred and fifty-six records were matched with Cancer Care Ontario. Thirty-seven incident cancers were detected. Malignant neoplasm of the brain was detected in one worker in the cohort. Among the four brain cancers one was a primary cancer, two were secondary cancers and one was an eye cancer. Lung cancer was found in 4 workers, breast cancer in 7 workers and prostate cancer in 6 workers.

Conclusion: A Participatory Action Research model can be used to study cancer clusters. Workers in general accepted the PAR method. They felt that the study was done honestly. A handbook to train workers in cancer cluster research will be available shortly. The perception of a cluster of primary brain cancer is not supported at this time. The lack of a positive association does not mean that there is an absence of cancer caused by the workplace; there are deficiencies in the cohort assembly and follow-up as well as a relatively young cohort and a short latency time