
Denmark ponders lung cancer breath test

Growing interest about the possibility of introducing a breath test for the early detection of lung cancer in seemingly healthy people in Denmark has prompted the health service (Sundhedsstyrelsen) to issue a guidance document on the procedure. The Danish move came in response to a positive assessment of the test by the UK-based National Horizon Scanning Centre.

The test under scrutiny was developed by US company Menssana Research (see *Clinica* No 1071, p 21). It received FDA approval for a version of the test in February this year, in connection with its potential to measure possible organ rejection in heart transplant patients. The diagnostic is viewed as the forerunner to possible breath tests for lung cancer, breast cancer, pre-eclampsia and tonsillitis, says Sundhedsstyrelsen. The Fort Lee, New Jersey firm says that its third multi-centre study of breath analysis for the detection of lung cancer has been finished and the results will be published later this year. The company will then seek approval for the test in the US and Europe.

Denmark's national cancer plan, introduced in 2000, did not recommend screening for lung cancer. However, the Danish Lung Cancer Group has this year pressed ahead with plans for a six-year study examining the use of low-dose multislice CT for screening purposes, targeting smokers and ex-smokers aged between 50-60 years. The breath test, should it be approved by the necessary regulatory authorities in Denmark, could offer an effective alternative.

Lung cancer is the most common form of cancer amongst men in Denmark and is also on the increase in women. There are some 3,500 new cases each year and the five-year survival rate is only 5%. However, Sundhedsstyrelsen says that, if the disease is detected early, this could be increased to 50%.