Dermatitis Fatality File

Ted worked as a tiler for 20 years and was skilled at his trade. But for ten years he suffered from dermatitis on his hands. His hands were red and cracked and his skin peeled. The itching and pain could be so bad that they woke him up at night. As well as the pain and embarrassment this caused, it meant long periods when he was unable to work, which created financial problems for him. The job that he enjoyed became a battle, the golf that he played in his spare time became a struggle, and his personal life lost its sparkle. At times he even felt that he had become a liability to his family and that life was no longer worth living.

He tried wearing gloves for work, but the craft nature of his job meant that he couldn’t wear them all the time. He used skin creams, but even that didn’t help.

Eventually Ted was referred to a skin specialist. He was tested and found to be allergic to the cement he used in his work and to chemicals in rubber gloves. Knowing what was causing his skin problem meant that he could start to find ways to avoid the things he was allergic to and helped him to come to terms with his condition.

Since being diagnosed, Ted has reduced his skin contact with cement as much as possible and gradually his skin has improved. His hands are still not completely clear of dermatitis, but his condition is much more manageable.

Ted is philosophical about his allergy, ‘I hope that recounting my experience will help publicise the misery caused by occupational dermatitis. Over many years I have learnt just how widespread the problem is.’