

No truth to retirement-lifespan link

Letter from Larry Haverkamp

I REFER to the letter “Retire early, live longer” by Tan Kok Tim (Aug 3). It refers to Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew’s comments in “I don’t think there should be a retirement age: MM” (July 29).

The author claims Mr Lee is wrong to say people should keep working. He argues that people will live longer if they retire early and cites a study by Boeing Aerospace retirees which found that staff who retired at 50 had an average lifespan of 86, and that those who retired at 65 lived to an average age of only 66.8 years.

He says the study found that “for every year a person works beyond age 55, he lives an average of two years less”.

Mr Tan is not correct. Boeing Corporation has put out a one-page paper on its webpage titled: “Let’s retire the rumour about life expectancy.” It explains that the graphs and study attributed to Boeing are a hoax.

The first sentence of the paper is: “An incorrect but alarming chart that claims to show the life expectancy of Boeing retirees

has been circulating on the Internet.

“It is not based on fact. There is no correlation between age at retirement and the life expectancy of Boeing retirees.

“We examine data regularly for trends. Our data shows that life expectancy of a Boeing retiree does not depend on age at retirement ... (This analysis) is based on 4,699 random samples over thirty years.”

According to Ms Julie Curtis, an actuary at Boeing: “The idea that working longer will shorten a Boeing employee’s life expectancy simply isn’t true.

“I’ve been looking at the data since 1983, and the length of a retiree’s life is unrelated to the age at his or her retirement. Our retirees tend to live a long time no matter how old they are when they retire.”

Boeing adds: “The first inaccurate life expectancy chart surfaced in the early ’80s, and versions of it have been floating around for years – almost as an ‘urban myth’.”

So, it looks like Minister Mentor’s intuition about working longer to live longer might not be so far off after all. Other research backs it up.

A study published in the *British Medi-*

cal Journal looked at 3,500 workers in the petrochemical industry who retired at ages 55, 60 and 65. It found that employees who retired at 55 had a significantly increased mortality compared with those who retired at 65. It noted, however, that some workers may have taken early retirement for health reasons.

An expert on ageing, Ms Sally Green-gross, is chief executive of the International Longevity Centre in Britain, and claims that greater social engagement and involvement is key to improving the health of older people. “Work is a huge part of this equation, and provides mental and physical activity, self-esteem, social interaction and income for many of us. Sudden retirement may not be the honeymoon we expect it to be,” she said.

The director-general of Age Concern, Mr Gordon Lishman, has a similar view. He said: “After stopping work, it is vital for older people to stay mentally and physically active to enjoy a fulfilling retirement.”

My two cents: A worthwhile pastime is writing letters to TODAY. After completing this one, I feel rejuvenated already.