

Hyping Health Risks: Environmental Hazards in Daily Life and the Science of Epidemiology

----- Original Message -----

From: Geoffrey Kabat geoffrey.kabat@einstein.yu.edu

To: Iris Atzmon

Sent: Saturday, August 27, 2011 4:49 PM

Subject: Response to Don and Atzmon

Amid the attempts to discredit me by people who clearly have not read my work or the core scientific reviews on ELF-EMF and RF but get their confirmatory information from fringe groups like the Bioinitiative group and gurus like Devra Davis, two central issues stand out:

1) I am charged with not spelling out the flaws of Hardell's work, which I was prevented from doing by the word limit. However, in an earlier article included as a link in the Forbes piece, I did make a point of the biases inherent in case-control studies of this issue, which Hardell's studies appear particularly affected by. <http://www.thedaily.com/page/2011/06/07/060711-opinions-oped-cellphones-cancer-kabat-1-2/> These flaws are carefully described in the 2009 review, "Epidemiologic evidence on mobile phones and tumor risk: A review" by Ahlbom et al. in 2009 in the highly-respected journal Epidemiology. This report was prepared by the International Commission for Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP). I am attaching a pdf of this lucid and reasonable assessment of the epidemiologic evidence. ICNIRP has just published an update in Environmental Health Perspectives, which I am attaching as well.

2) In all of the emoting and ad hominem attacks, a key point is ignored, and that is that the IARC working group, after its exhaustive review, concluded that there was really no consistent evidence that RF is capable of inducing or promoting cancer, very much in line with the ICNIRP report. What I was criticizing in the Forbes article was not the review itself but the "2B/possible carcinogen" label, which did not follow from the review and which, in addition, is confusing and needlessly anxiety provoking.

Geoffrey Kabat, Ph.D. New York August 28, 2011

From: Iris Atzmon

Sent: Saturday, August 27, 2011 8:58 AM

To: Cc: Geoffrey Kabat Subject: Answering Dr. Kabat's Forbes article

After distributing the article by Dr. Geoffrey Kabat on the IARC decision, I

received some reactions, Dr. Kabat is cc to this email.

Short comments was received from a journalist who says this sentence is slander: "One well-informed scientist told me that she thought the committee member who resigned did so in disgust at the weight given to the Hardell studies". An activist refers to the Spiked article: <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/7389/> and says that the Bioinitiative, 15-reasons & the Ron Herberman warning were presented as "activist groups" without giving any reasons as to why he disagrees with their data - how can anyone take that seriously.

Another reaction is this article From Don Maisch:

<http://www.emfacts.com/2011/08/dr-kabat-another-rat-in-the-barrel/>

On August 23rd Forbes Magazine published an article by epidemiologist Geoffrey Kabat (article 1 below) that is extremely critical of the IARC ruling on RF as a class 2B possible carcinogen. Kabat briefly notes of the dismissal of Anders Ahlbom from the committee because of a conflict of interest and the work of Lennart Hardell which Kabat suggests was "seriously flawed". Kabat also suggests that Hardell was only included as a member of the working group because of pressure from activists and the media and that the real reason an epidemiologist from US National Cancer Institute (Inskip) resigned from the IARC committee was because of his disgust at the weight given to the Hardell studies.

With all this criticism of Hardell's research what about an explanation of exactly why his research is supposed to be 'seriously flawed'? None is offered in the Forbes article except hearsay. What Dr. Kabat needs to do now is to get back to his group of "most respected academic epidemiologists" and provide a reasoned analysis on exactly how Hardell's research is seriously flawed so that it can be openly debated. Unsubstantiated rumours from unnamed experts is gossip not science.

Bruce Armstrong (Australia's Interphone head) spoke at a scientific conference in Melbourne late last year. He mentioned the controversy over Hardell's Interphone findings but said that he could not find any methodological weaknesses in it.

Kabat suggests that the dismissal of Ahlbom (and other issues) for conflict of interest has not been adequately pursued. That was a straightforward event. Ahlbom was dismissed after it was found that he had significant industry financial interests that he had not declared. According to Microwave News:

"IARC moved quickly after learning that Ahlbom is a director of his brother's

consulting firm, Gunnar Ahlbom AB. The company, which is based in Brussels, the European capital and a center for lobbyists, was established to help clients on telecom issues, with an emphasis on environmental and energy regulations. Ahlbom failed to mention this sideline in his “Declaration of Interests” that is required of all those who participate in IARC cancer assessments”.

Link.<<http://www.microwavenews.com/Ahlbom.html#Continued>>

Ahlbom also resigned as the chairman of the Swedish Radiation Protection Authority’s expert group on EMFs and RF radiation after the Authority started an investigation into whether his connection to his brother’s telecom consulting firm might have constituted a conflict with his advisory role at the Authority. Link.<<http://www.microwavenews.com/ShortTakes.html>>

Kabat criticises Hardell’s research without giving reasons, other than hearsay, but Kabat himself has a recent history of “seriously flawed” research with an additional substantial taint of conflict of interest. Namely the 2003 Enstrom and Kabat secondhand smoke study, partially funded by Philip Morris and the Council on Tobacco Research, a front group created in 1954 by the tobacco companies to fund research on smoking and health. (See 2nd article below).

Don

1) Forbes: Behind The World Health Organization’s “Cancerous” Pronouncement On Cell Phones

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2011/08/23/world-health-organization-cancerous-cell-phones/>

Geoffrey Kabat

Geoffrey Kabat, a cancer epidemiologist at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, lays out how WHO’s cancer conclusions don’t square with actual science.

We rely on health and regulatory agencies to provide impartial assessments of potential health risks. Unfortunately, these agencies can be subject to the same political and professional pressures at work in society generally. An example of this is the recent, widely-publicized pronouncement by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (which is part of the World Health Organization) to the effect that radiofrequency radiation (or RF) from cell phones was “possibly carcinogenic.” Coming only a year after publication of the results of a large multi-country study, which showed no convincing evidence of a hazard, IARC’s announcement left the public as well as many scientists nonplussed. IARC is a prestigious agency that since the early

1970s has been producing respected monographs evaluating the evidence for a wide range of chemical, physical, and hormonal agents in the carcinogenic process. The cell phone report was the result of an intensive, week-long review by a committee of experts. In spite of the consternation caused by the report in professional circles, there has been little insight into how the IARC could evaluate all of the relevant scientific evidence and come up with an impossibly vague conclusion. Like many of my colleagues, I was dismayed by the IARC announcement, which did not square with my reading of the scientific evidence.

Hints that not everything was harmonious in the IARC process seeped out but have not been pursued. These include the dismissal from the committee of one of the foremost experts on non-ionizing radiation, a Swedish epidemiologist, due to a “conflict of interest” and the resignation from the committee of an epidemiologist specializing in brain tumors at the National Cancer Institute.

In June I contacted both of these colleagues asking if they would agree to answer questions about the committee’s deliberations, but in both cases they politely declined. One colleague, who is knowledgeable about both IARC and the National Cancer Institute group, offered that scientists involved in this contentious issue have a strong incentive to keep a low profile.

SNIP

However, Hardell’s work is viewed as seriously flawed by some of the most respected academic epidemiologists working in this area. It appears that he was included as a member of the working group in response to pressure from activists and the media. One well-informed scientist told me that she thought the committee member who resigned did so in disgust at the weight given to the Hardell studies

SNIP

In classifying RF as a “possible carcinogen,” IARC has aligned itself with the “precautionary principle,” which sounds perfectly reasonable, except that it is often used to conjure up the existence of a possible hazard in the face of extensive and solid evidence suggesting the non-existence of a hazard. Of course, we need to spell out the limits of current knowledge, but we also need to rely on scientists and health agencies to use logic, analytic rigor, and clear language to assess what things are worth worrying about.

Geoffrey Kabat, Ph.D., is a cancer epidemiologist at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and the author of “Hyping Health Risks: Environmental Hazards in Daily Life and the Science of Epidemiology.”

2) From the website of the American Nonsmokers' Rights (ANR) Foundation.

<http://www.no-smoke.org/document.php?id=333>

The tobacco industry has a long history of trying to cast doubt on the science of secondhand smoke. In its latest attempt, the industry has funded a new study, published in the British Medical Journal. The study, written by researchers funded by the tobacco industry, misrepresented data from the American Cancer Society (ACS), and used flawed methodology to come to the inaccurate conclusion that secondhand smoke does not cause an increased risk for lung cancer and heart disease. Don't be fooled by Big Tobacco. Secondhand smoke kills.

"The study is fundamentally flawed."

—British Medical Association¹

The British Medical Journal published a study in its May 2003 issue entitled, "Environmental tobacco smoke and tobacco related mortality in a prospective study of Californians, 1960-1998," which was authored by Dr. James E. Enstrom and Dr. Geoffrey C. Kabat. The study claimed that no causal relationship was found between secondhand smoke and tobacco-related mortality, after analyzing data from 35,351 adults over a period of thirty-eight years. As one might expect, the study generated an enormous amount of media attention. Speculation abounded that the unanimous conclusion of public health officials and medical practitioners, that secondhand smoke is hazardous to health, had been premature. Big Tobacco and its allies hailed the study as proof that the adverse health effects of secondhand smoke are greatly exaggerated. Under closer scrutiny, the inevitable was found to be true: the Enstrom and Kabat secondhand smoke study was largely funded by tobacco industry dollars, conducted by industry allies, and riddled with methodological errors.

Although the Enstrom and Kabat secondhand smoke study has now largely been discredited, the tobacco industry and its allies attempt to use the study to cast doubt upon the science of secondhand smoke. This document provides some basic information regarding the study, its funding, and its authors, and should help to counter any attempts to use the study to undermine the established body of research confirming the health hazards of secondhand smoke. THE STUDY

"The editors believe that this opinion piece is full of speculative assumptions of doubtful scientific value. We could not judge the merits of your criticisms because your own data and methods were so inadequately described. I

should add that your article contains pejorative comments that should have no place in responsible scientific discourse.”

—Letter from the Journal of the American Medical Association to James E. Enstrom²

The data and design of the Enstrom and Kabat secondhand smoke study has been widely criticized. Even the British Medical Association, the publisher of the journal that printed the study, described the research as being “fundamentally flawed.”³ The misuse of data and flawed methodology are two very significant faults in the study.

Enstrom and Kabat did not gather original data for their study. Instead, it drew on data from the ACS’s Cancer Prevention Study (CPS-I), and used only a small subset (approximately 10%) of the total CPS-I data. Researchers at ACS repeatedly warned Enstrom that the data from CPS-I could not be used to determine the health effects of secondhand smoke, and they spoke out against the study upon its release, stating that their data had been misused.⁴

The study used cohort methodology to look at the rate of mortality from heart disease and lung cancer in nonsmokers who were married to smokers, covering a time period from 1959 to 1998. A severe error in the study was the failure to establish a control group of nonsmokers who were unexposed to secondhand smoke. Other critical methodological flaws include not measuring for secondhand smoke exposure from any source other than the spouse, including workplace (where smoking was extremely prevalent at the time); not taking into account either spouse’s smoking status after 1972, though the study continued for 26 more years; and classifying the nonsmoking spouse as still exposed to secondhand smoke in that 26 year period, during which time the “smoking spouse” could have quit smoking or died, not to mention that they could have divorced or separated.

THE FUNDING

“A substantial research commitment on your part is necessary in order for me to effectively compete against the large mountain of epidemiologic data and opinions that already exist regarding the health effects of ETS and active smoking.”

– Dr. James E. Enstrom to Philip Morris Research Center⁵

The Enstrom and Kabat secondhand smoke study was initially funded by a grant from the Tobacco Related Disease Research Program, an organization that manages funds generated by the Proposition 99 California state cigarette tax. After the program’s scientific, peer-review panel, denied continued

funding for the project, Enstrom sought out financial support from other sources. In 1997, he submitted an application for,⁶ and ultimately received, \$210,000 from Philip Morris and the Council on Tobacco Research (CTR)^{7,8,9}, a front group created in 1954 by the tobacco companies to fund research on smoking and health.¹⁰ It became well known over the years for sponsoring flimsy scientific research that promoted tobacco industry positions.

THE AUTHORS

“For the past three years, I have done consulting and research on passive smoking for Jeffery L. Furr of Womble Carlyle on behalf of RJ Reynolds and Philip Morris.”

– Dr. James Enstrom to the Center of Indoor Air Research¹¹

Dr. James E. Enstrom: Enstrom has played down the support that he has received from the tobacco industry, but his involvement with the industry can be traced back for many years. As early as 1975, Enstrom solicited the CTR for \$50,000 to “assess the possible role which other factors besides smoking play in the etiology of cancer.”¹² The Competing Interests section of the Enstrom and Kabat secondhand smoke study states: “In recent years [Enstrom] has received funds originating from the tobacco industry for his tobacco related epidemiological research because it has been impossible for him to obtain equivalent funds from other sources.”¹³ Although the CTR, the Tobacco Institute, and Center for Indoor Air Research (CIAR) are all now defunct, Enstrom continued to contract with Philip Morris.^{14,15}

Dr. Geoffrey Kabat: Kabat’s connections with the tobacco industry over the years have been well documented. A search of internal industry documents finds Kabat’s name listed as an industry resource more than 7,000 times, showing his involvement with, among others, Philip Morris, R.J. Reynolds, American Tobacco Company, and CIAR.¹⁶

CONCLUSION

Enstrom and Kabat’s substantial methodological flaws, combined with the tobacco industry’s funding of the study, and other studies supported by the tobacco industry, can help you to inoculate others against this misinformation. Over one hundred independently funded, peer-reviewed studies show that secondhand smoke exposure causes serious disease and death in nonsmokers. Don’t let this one study undermine the body of solid science that confirms the hazardous health effects of secondhand smoke exposure. For more information on Enstrom and Kabat or other studies that challenge the credible science of secondhand smoke, please contact us at

(510) 841-3032 or at anr@no-smoke.org .

<http://www.no-smoke.org/document.php?id=333?>REFERENCES>

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