IARC, the RF–Cancer Review & the Ahlbom Affair

May 31, 2011

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IARC Classifies RF as "Possibly Carcinogenic to Humans"

The decision was close to unanimous. As IARC's Robert Baan put it: There was an "encouraging majority in agreement." The full story is here.

May 30, 2011

Where's Jack Siemiatycki?

Looking at the list of authors of the Interphone tumor location paper —the one that points to a cell phone risk— one name is noticeably absent: Jack Siemiatycki's.

Siemiatycki of the University of Montreal is the leader of the epidemiology panel of the IARC working group. He replaced Anders Ahlbom who was removed just before the meeting. People have been wondering where Siemiatycki stands on RF cancer risks. All the more so after he questioned the use of the precautionary principle a few days ago. "If we had applied it 2,000 years ago, we'd still be in caves, making fires by rubbing sticks together," Siemiatycki told Canada's *National Post*, "At what point does the precautionary principle paralyze any technological development?"

Five countries contributed to the tumor location paper that will appear in Occupational & Environmental Medicine (OEM): Australia, Canada, France, Israel and New Zealand. Canada has two different Interphone groups, one based in Ottawa and Vancouver led by Dan Krewski and Mary McBride and one in

Montreal led by Siemiatycki, Marie-Élise Parent and Lesley Richardson. All of them have their names on the paper except Siemiatycki. (Worth noting: Richardson and Siemiatycki are married to each other.)

The only mention of Siemiatycki in the *OEM* paper is an acknowledgment for his "allowing the use" of the Montreal data set.

So, the question stands: Why didn't he sign onto the paper with the others? Maybe we'll learn something tomorrow when IARC reveals whether the working group has classified mobile phone radiation "possibly carcinogenic to humans."

May 29, 2011

Dueling Tumor Location Papers from Interphone

IARC's RF panel is evaluating not one but two papers on the location of tumors relative to where cell phone radiation is deposited in the brain. Both are from the Interphone project, but they present very different conclusions.

A few days ago, we learned that the IARC working group had been given an analysis by researchers from five Interphone countries, which supports an RF radiation-tumor link. It turns out that the IARC group is also evaluating a second paper from seven other Interphone countries that says there is no such link. (The seven countries are Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the U.K.) This second paper concludes that gliomas, a type of brain tumor, are not "preferentially located in the parts of the brain with the highest [RF radiation] from mobile phones."

The fact that there are two completely separate papers from the Interphone project should not be surprising. Disagreements on how to interpret the results have led to bitter battles among the various national groups, to the point that data are no longer shared, and in some cases, participants no longer talk to each other (see "Interphone: The Cracks Begin To Show").

This new paper will appear in an upcoming issue of the *American Journal of Epidemiology,* a leading journal. Among the 21 authors are Germany's Maria Blettner, a member of the IARC panel, and Joachim Schüz who is attending the meeting as part of the IARC secretariat —and Anders Ahlbom.

The authors acknowledge that their study, like all others, suffers from the small number (42) of cases who had used mobile phones for ten or more years. Interestingly, the new paper uses a technique developed by the electric utility industry (EPRI) to investigate the association between power-line magnetic fields and childhood leukemia. When the technique is applied tumor location. it points to a "suggestion of an increased risk" —a doubling of the incidence of brain tumors— related to long-term use of a cell phone. But the group discounts the finding because it is not statistically significant.

IARC: “Anyone” Would Perceive This as a Conflict of Interest

This morning, *Svenska Dagbladet (SvD)*, a leading Swedish newspaper, devotes a half page to the Ahlbom affair. *SvD* is the first daily to cover the controversy over Ahlbom's removal from the IARC RF panel and the ongoing investigation by the Swedish Radiation Protection Authority. There's not much new here. What is noteworthy is that the editors highlight in large type a comment from Nicolas Gaudin, IARC's chief spokesman: "Anyone you'd ask in the street would perceive this as a conflict of interest." Gaudin was referring to the fact that Anders Ahlbom is a director of his brother's telecom consulting firm. Ahlbom says that the company did not work on health risks. And when asked about why IARC disinvited him, he replies: "It's up to IARC to decide who is on its working groups." *SvD* also points out that in the early 1990's, Gunnar Ahlbom, Anders's brother, was the country manager for TeliaSonera in Belgium. Actually, at that time, Sweden's Telia and Finland's Sonera were two separate companies. The combined company now has more than 150 million mobile phone customers.

In a second article, also posted today, *SvD* looks beyond the views of Anders Ahlbom, who has long been the primary source on cell phone risks for the Swedish press. In contrast to Ahlbom's views that there are no risks, the newspaper cites the oncerns of Elisabeth Cardis and Siegal Sadetzki. Both are members of Interphone, who earlier this year publicly advised precaution in the use of mobile phones, especially for children. This second article appeared in the May 30 print edition of *SvD*. The paper devoted an entire page (p.8) to the story and assorted side bars.

May 28, 2011

New Israeli Cancer Study Also Sent to IARC

An Israeli study of 47 cancer patients who were exposed to RF radiation —some were also exposed to ELF frequencies and other toxic agents such as solvents— was sent, like the two Interphone papers, to IARC at the last minute for consideration by the RF panel, we've been told.

The paper comes from a team at the Hebrew University-Hadassah School of Medicine in Jerusalem and has been accepted for publication by the *European Journal of Oncology*. The lead authors are Yael Stein and Elihu Richter.

The researchers report that they found cancers in young patients and that, in general, the latency periods were short and that the tumors were in "hot parts" of the body (those that were more exposed or are more vulnerable or both). The types of cancer are those of the blood, head, neck and testes. They observe that there is a "coherent pattern" between the onset of occupational exposure and latency periods for the three classes of tumors: for testicular cancer they were very short, longer for cancers of the blood and still longer for solid tumors.

Stein and Richter conclude: "The findings are disturbing and cannot be ignored" and make the case for "further investigation regarding a possible connection between these exposures and promotion of cancer, for individual workers exposed to high levels of EMF radiation."

May 27, 2011

Results of IARC RF–Cancer Meeting To Be Announced Tuesday, May 31

IARC will announce the outcome of its RF–cancer assessment next Tuesday at 6pm Lyon time (CET), which is noon on the East Coast of the U.S. At the same time Jonathan Samet, will join IARC officials, including Director Chris Wild at a "virtual" press briefing. There will also a "real" press conference an hour later. Samet teaches at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and is serving as the chair of the IARC work group.

Ahlbom Explains Why He's Not in Lyon

In an interview with Swedish radio today, Anders Ahlbom said that while he was offered the opportunity to attend the IARC RF meeting in Lyon as a a non-voting invited expert, he declined because there would be no point in taking part under those conditions.

May 26, 2011

Ahlbom's Colleagues Express "Outrage" at IARC, Attack Hardell

Colleagues of Anders Ahlbom from ICNIRP, Interphone and the Karolinska Institute are fighting back. In a letter to Chris Wild, the IARC director, 20 professors and researchers state that they are "disturbed" by how IARC has selected participants for its ongoing RF–cancer review and how decisions on conflicts of interest were made. They suggest that IARC succumbed to pressure from "journalists or pressure groups" by removing Ahlbom and that the agency failed to exclude "others whose conflicts are more than a matter of 'possible perception'."

The group of 20 never refers to Anders Ahlbom by name. Nor is Lennart Hardell mentioned, but it is clear that he is the one they intimate should not be on the IARC panel. Earlier this week, Ahlbom himself wrote to the IARC staff and panel members asking that Hardell be removed from the panel. IARC took no action.

One of the signers is Maria Feychting, Ahlbom's former graduate student and now a professor at the Karolinska. Others include Adele Green, Anthony Swerdlow and Paolo Vecchia, who are all members of ICNIRP, as well as David Savitz, a member of ICNIRP's committee on epidemiology. Also signing the letter are a number of those working on the Interphone project, including Susanna Lagorio and Patricia McKinney. ICNIRP's Swerdlow also

works on Interphone. Most of the other signers are with the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

There is a measure of irony in that at the top of the list of signers is Hans-Olov Adami, the chair of the department of epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health. Ten years ago, the Swedish tabloid *Aftonbladet revealed* that Adami, then a professor at the Karolinska, had a sideline working for the chemical industry through Exponent, an industry-friendly consulting firm. Five years later, Hardell wrote about how Adami went to Korea with Exponent's Jack Mandel, to cast doubt on the proposition that dioxin causes cancer —even though IARC and the NIH had classified it as a "known human carcinogen."
(In a response, Adami continued to maintain that dioxin "may not be carcinogenic even at…higher levels.")

Feychting sent the same letter to Hélène Asp of the Swedish Radiation Protection Authority, which is investigating Ahlbom's potential conflicts. In a cover note, Feychting ups the ante, this time saying that the group of 20 is "outraged" by the way IARC behaved. She also states that "many more" are in the wings ready to sign the letter.

Read the letter to Wild here.

Latest Coverage of Ahlbom and De Seze

Sweden's largest technology and IT newspaper, *Ny Teknik,* a weekly, is the first print publication in Sweden to write about the Ahlbom's removal from the IARC panel.

And *Le Canard Enchaîné,* the satirical French weekly, has weighed in with two short items. One is about Ahlbom. The other spotlights the suspicious circumstances surrounding the cancellation of a planned debate following last week's documentary that was highly critical of René de Seze, another member of the IARC panel (see our May 19 report).

May 25, 2011

Cardis Participating from Barcelona

Elisabeth Cardis may not be in Lyon in person, but she is working on the IARC RF review from Barcelona. "I am participating by phone/Skype," she told *Microwave News* in an e-mail this morning. "I am stuck at home on crutches," she wrote, adding that a family setback also forced her to stay home.

Scandinavian Press Coverage: Ahlbom Stays Mum

On the Anders Ahlbom front, Swedish National Radio and Norwegian television picked up the story of his potential conflicts and his being removed from the IARC panel. Mona Nilsson, the Swedish journalist, who broke the story abut Ahlbom being a director of his brother's consulting firm reports that Swedish radio wanted to follow-up with a debate with her and Ahlbom and

the Swedish Radiation Protection Authority. (On Monday, the authority announced that it will investigate the Ahlbom affair.) But the show will not go on. Ahlbom refused to debate Nilsson, she told us. And Lars Mjönes, the person in charge at the radiation authority is on vacation, as is Hélène Asp, its head of radiation protection. "It's a type of censorship," Nilsson told us. "It's an effective way to stop the debate."

May 24, 2011

Two New Interphone Papers Affirm Cell Phone Tumor Risk

Just in time! The IARC panel has two new Interphone papers to consider: *Both show a link between tumors and cell phones.* In his opening remarks to the working group this morning, IARC Director Chris Wild noted that he is "pleased" that a number of "recent manuscripts" from the IARC-led Interphone study would be on the agenda.

One paper shows a clear association between the radiation plume from the user's cell phone and the location of the tumor. It's "tough to refute," said one well-placed source. "It strengthens the case that we have a problem," said another. The paper will be published by *Occupational and Environmental Medicine,* a peer-reviewed journal.

Microwave News has been told that the location paper shows a significant increased risk after seven years of use, with a significant dose-response. The elevated risk remains even after the heaviest users are taken out —an important point since some members of Interphone have said that the heaviest users skewed the data in the original Interphone paper published last year.

The number of cases in this new analysis is small because only Australia, Canada, France, Israel and New Zealand participated. Researchers from the northern European countries, including those from Sweden's Karolinska group and the Danish Cancer Society, refused to share their data with Elisabeth Cardis, the project leader.

The second paper is on acoustic neuromas, and, as expected, it too shows an increased risk on the side the cell phone was used. This latter paper includes data from all the Interphone countries; the lead authors are Cardis and Joachim Schüz, who is a member of both the Danish and German Interphone study groups and now works at IARC.

Wild also told the group that, "The eyes of the world are upon you" and later added, "For the record let me state that other than in the case of journalists, we have turned away no applications from organizations wishing to have a presence here through observers or representatives." That sounds right on both counts.

Cardis and Szmigielski Not in Lyon

In other news, neither Elisabeth Cardis nor Poland's Stan Szmigielski are in Lyon for the meeting. And as for Anders Ahlbom's plea that Lennart Hardell should also be sent packing because of his own conflicts of interest, it is a non-issue. No one even talked about it today, we hear.

Le Monde Picks Up the Story

The Swedish press has so far been silent about Ahlbom's removal as the head of IARC's RF task group on epidemiology and is not at the meeting. In contrast, France's *Le Monde* ran a story in this afternoon's edition (dated May 25).

The paper quotes Nicolas Gaudin, IARC's chief spokesman, saying that Ahlbom had told the agency that he didn't think his brother's consulting company's work on telecom issues was a big deal because it had to do with fiber optics and such systems do not transmit radiation.

May 23, 2011

Ahlbom Fires Back: Wants Hardell Kicked Off Too

The IARC RF Monograph meeting in Lyon this week is in danger of turning into a brawl. After being dropped from the panel, Karolinska's Anders Ahlbom has launched a counterattack from Stockholm. In an e-mail sent out this morning to all the members of the RF working group and to IARC Director Chris Wild and his staff, Ahlbom wrote that Lennart Hardell should be kicked off too. That's because Hardell recruited Cindy Sage to his research team at Õrebro University and Sage "runs a private consulting company that profits from people's fear of EMF exposure." (Ahlbom closes his e-mail: "Being forced to write letters like this one is genuinely unpleasant.") We asked Hardell for his response. Sage "is not in our research team," he said, explaining that she got an appointment from the University after issuing the BioInitiative Report. Later, Hardell sent out his own e-mail to those who had received Ahlbom's original message pointing out that Sage has not received any compensation as part of her appointment as a guest lecturer from 2008-2011 and that "Cindy Sage has never been employed or had a position at the Department of Oncology, Örebro University Hospital."

Ahlbom Says Brother's Firm Does Not Work for Ericsson

Also this morning, Ahlbom wrote to *Microwave News* to point out that, contrary to what we wrote yesterday based on a usually reliable source, Ericsson is *not* a client of his brother's consulting firm.

IARC Tries To Spin Ahlbom's Removal

Meanwhile IARC is insisting that Ahlbom was not removed from the working group. But he was. Chris Wild and the others are just

playing semantic games. As we reported yesterday, IARC told Ahlbom that he could still come, but only as an "invited expert." This would have put him in the same category as Switzerland's Niels Kuster. The key difference is that invited experts cannot vote on how to categorize RF radiation —say, as a possible or probable carcinogen. Ahlbom decided that he did not want to attend under those restrictions.

Revised List of IARC Participants

IARC has posted a revised list of participants, dated today. This new version features footnotes on potential conflicts of interest. Ahlbom is listed as an invited expert with this footnote: "Anders Ahlbom served (until May 2011) on the Board of Directors of Gunnar Ahlbom AB, a consulting firm in the domains of EU affairs, especially within telecommunications." There are also new details on René de Seze, Niels Kuster, Meike Mevissen and Luc Verschaeve, as well as the three industry observers (Joe Elder, Jack Rowley and Mays Swicord). Notably absent, given Ahlbom's attack earlier today, is any footnote for Hardell.

Swedish Radiation Officials Are Investigating Ahlbom's Conflicts

Swedish Radiation Protection Authority has issued a press release announcing that it is taking the Ahlbom affair "very seriously" and investigating whether it might affect Ahlbom's role as chairman of its own expert group, which issues an annual review of new EMF/EMR research.

See also our related stories:

IARC Drops Anders Ahlbom from RF–Cancer Panel

French TV Documentary Links IARC RF Panelist to Industry Interference

IARC Welcomes Industry to RF–Cancer Review

IARC, Anders Ahlbom, Christopher Wild, Jonathan Samet, Maria Blettner, Maria Feychting, Interphone, Elisabeth Cardis, Jack Siemiatycki, Lennart Hardell, Cindy Sage, Mona Nilsson, acoustic neuroma, Stan Szmigielski, Robert Baan,

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