Something Is Rotten in Denmark

Danish Cancer Society Plays Games with Brain Cancer Rates

December 13, 2013
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Just over a year ago, the Danish Cancer Society (DCS) issued a news advisory with some alarming news: The number of men diagnosed with glioblastoma, the most malignant type of brain cancer, had doubled over the last ten years (for a copy of the advisory, see our June 2 update below). Hans Skovgaard Poulsen, the head of neuro-oncology at Copenhagen University Hospital was quoted in the release as saying that this was a "frightening development."

At the time, Christoffer Johansen, a senior researcher at the DCS told us: "I think the data is true and valid." And Joachim Schüz, a long time collaborator of Johansen's at the DCS who is now at the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in Lyon told *Microwave News* that the news was "indeed a concern." He said that he could not explain it. (See our report here.)

After that, there was silence. No one talked about the spike in glioblastomas. Over the following year, we kept asking people whether there was any follow-up news. But there was nothing.

Then last week, *Epidemiology,* a leading journal, released an advance copy of a commentary on "Mobiles and Cancer," which will appear in its January 2014 issue. The lead author is Jonathan Samet of the University of Southern California, who was the chair of IARC's 2011 review of the cancer risks of exposure to RF radiation. That same year, President Obama appointed Samet to the National Cancer Advisory Board (NCAB). After a week of deliberations in Lyon, Samet's panel designated RF radiation as a possible human carcinogen. Samet's paper has three coauthors, including Schüz; all three are associated with IARC.

Samet's five-page commentary adds little that is new, other than reemphasizing the need for more research and the need to keep

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people informed. But one sentence in the text stood out to us. Samet wrote: “incidence rates in the Nordic countries [are] still showing no increase [in gliomas] —particularly in the subgroup of middle-aged men who were among the first to use mobile phones.” What about Skovgaard Poulsen’s “frightening” report?, we wondered.

Samet had to be aware of last year’s alert from Skovgaard Poulsen. After all Schüz, his coauthor, has close ties to the cancer society. And, in the unlikely event that Schüz had not told him, we had. Last December, we wrote to Samet to ask him about what Skovgaard Poulsen was saying. He replied that he had not yet seen the data. We moved on and waited. Ten days ago, we wrote to Samet once again asking about the Danish brain tumor rates, with a copy to his coauthors. This time Samet did not reply, nor did any of the others.

We then wrote to Poulsen. He did not reply. We had also written to him last year and he had not replied then either.

We wrote to Kurt Damsgaard, the head of communications for the Danish Cancer Society. He did not reply. A couple of days later we did receive a one-line message from Lone Zilstorff, a journalist on the society’s staff. She was the author of the original DCS press release with the news about the spike in glioblastoma. She passed on Skovgaard Poulsen's e-mail address and said that we should contact him directly. We wrote back to Zilstorff pointing out that Skovgaard Poulsen is not talking and asked her once again for clarification. She did not reply.

Not knowing where else to turn, we wrote directly to Schüz. This time, he did answer, suggesting that we contact Christoffer Johansen at the DCS. Over a long string of e-mails, Johansen told us that Skovgaard Poulsen had made an error when reporting the incidence of glioblastoma, failing to properly adjust the data. Apparently, things had also gotten garbled in the press statement written by Zilstorff.

Has the Incidence of Aggressive Brain Tumors Doubled or Not?

All this leads back to the central question: Did the incidence of glioblastoma among men double over the last decade, as Skovgaard Poulsen announced last year? If not, what had changed? We asked Johansen. He would not or could not tell us.

Our search continued. We learned that Lennart Hardell of Sweden’s Örebro Hospital in Sweden, has also tried to talk to Skovgaard Poulsen, but he never got through. Hardell’s epidemiological studies have linked cell phones to brain tumors and acoustic neuromas; they were cited as part of the rationale for IARC’s decision to classify RF radiation as a possible cancer agent.

Henrik Eiriksson, an IT specialist and EMF activist, who helps run the Mast Victims Web site from his home on the outskirts of Copenhagen, had a little more, if indirect, success. Here’s what Eiriksson told us: He called Skovgaard Poulsen last November and

learned that he was at a conference in Pakistan. Eiriksson ended up talking to a member of the lab, who said that they were working with two hypotheses to explain the observed increase in glioblastoma. The first was a viral infection of the brain. But this was deemed unlikely, she said, because there was scant evidence for such an association. The second hypothesis involved cell phones. Here again, she said, that possibility was largely eliminated because "cell phones have been ruled out by the Danish Cancer Society."

The Danish Cancer Society bases its views on cell phones largely on what is known as the Danish Cohort Study, which is touted by its authors and some others as the best evidence that the use of cell phones is tumor-safe. Others, us included, see the whole project as riddled with so many problems that it is just about worthless. (Here's our take: "The Danish Cohort Study: The Politics and Economics of Bias.")

Finally, we turned to Mona Nilsson, a Swedish journalist who keeps close tabs on cell phones and health in Nordic countries. What's going on at the Danish Cancer Society?, we asked. "They don't want to talk about the incidence of glioma," she replied. "I get the feeling they are hiding something."

Nilsson explained what *is* known about brain tumor rates. She guided us through a recent (2011) report from the State Serum Institute, known as SSI (the Danish equivalent of the CDC in the U.S.). It shows a 30% increase in the number of brain and central nervous tumors among Danish men over the ten years, 2002-2011 (Table 1 on p.5 of the report). The increase among Danish women was 25%. [The ten-year rates through 2012 have been relased, see below.] The problem, Nilsson noted, is that the data lump together malignant and benign tumors and they are not broken down by subtypes. The general category therefore includes all sorts of different kinds of brain tumors as well as acoustic neuromas. At the moment, there is no easy way to know what the increase was for glioblastoma, the most aggressive type of malignant brain tumors without digging deeper.

Who in this sad story is finally going to tell us what's really going on? That would be the only way to clean out the rot that festers in Denmark.

December 20, 2013

The latest edition (2012) of the Danish SSI's tumor incidence data has just been released. The ten-year, from 2003 through 2012, increase of CNS tumors is now 41.2% among men and 46.1% among women (Table 1 on p.8 of the SSI report).

June 2, 2014

The Danish Cancer Society has removed the original 2012 news advisory noting the spike in glioblastoma from its Web site. (The original link is now "404"). It is still available, however, from the Internet Archive's "Wayback Machine". Here is the news advisory

as it was first posted by the society. If you open this link in Chrome, Google will automatically translate the page into English.

June 3, 2014

A letter from Elisabeth Cardis's group at CREAL, together with a second letter from Lennart Hardell's group in Sweden, on the January 2014 commentary by Jonathan Samet and his colleagues at IARC (including Joachim Schüz) appear in the July issue of *Epidemiology*, together with the response from Samet *et al*. All three items are open access.

November 11, 2015

The 2013 SSI tumor data show a sharp drop in the incidence of brain and CNS tumors: a more than 12% decrease from 2012 (see Table 1 on p.7). The 10-year increase from 2004 to 2013 is now 8.5% for men and 5.5% for women, down from the more than 40% increases in the previous report. (Use this link to access the last ten years of SSI tumor registry reports.)

February 23, 2016

According to the 2014 SSI tumor data, the decline in the incidence of brain and CNS tumors among men has stopped and the rate has turned up. But not so for women. Since last year, there was an increase of 2.8% among men, and a decline of 3.0% for women (see Table 1 on p.7).

In this new report, the 10-year trend shows an increase of 10.2% among men and 8.8% among women. but a decrease of 12.8% and 10.5%, respectively, over the last five years (since 2010).

Danish Cancer Society, Denmark, Hans Skovgaard Poulsen, brain tumors, glioma, Jonathan Samet, Joachim Schüz, Christoffer Johansen, IARC, Henrik Eiriksson, Mona Nilsson, Elisabeth Cardis, epidemiology,

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