What Changed at NTP?

Same RF Cancer Data, Different Outlook

February 7, 2018

Why was the NTP so ambivalent about its cell phone cancer findings at the press conference last Friday when two years ago the same scientific evidence prompted a public health warning?

Some of the pathology numbers got tweaked since they were first released in 2016, but the changes were minor. It's the same data set —but with a very different interpretation. The NTP mindset somehow shifted from we need to release this important new health data *now* to this is "not a high-risk situation."

Who or what moved the NTP managers to change their outlook? There's no shortage of suspects and suspicions. Here are a few making the rounds:

¶ There's new leadership at the NTP. John Bucher, who ran the RF project and called for the 2016 early release is no longer the associate director. Brian Berridge has taken his place and now manages NTP's day-to-day affairs. Berridge is so new on the job he may not have had a chance to push for any changes. Still, he comes from SmithKlineGlaxo, a drug company with a capitalization of close to $100 billion. That's Big Pharma and the corporate mindset that comes with it. Bucher is still at NTP, as a senior scientist, but he does not run the show like he did two years ago.

¶ Linda Birnbaum, the director of both NIEHS and the NTP and Berridge's boss, is already under fire from House Republicans for advocating the control of toxic chemicals. Last month, she was accused of lobbying for public health. (Sounds strange, but so does much of what goes on in Washington these days.) Birnbaum can only fight so many political battles at the same time. RF may be a bridge too far.

¶ Francis Collins, the director of the NIH, is said to have no confidence in the RF study. He tried to stop the early release of the cancer data two years ago. Michael Lauer, a senior NIH manager

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who was a major critic of the NTP study back then, was believed to be speaking for Collins.

¶ The head of the FDA center with oversight on cell phones dismissed the evidence of a cancer risk as “mostly equivocal or ambiguous.” Nothing would change, he said. Think of the FDA as NTP's client: It nominated the animal study back in 1999 and now wants nothing more to do with it.

¶ The Trump Administration ridicules scientific evidence that threatens big business. Whether the subject is global warming, chemical safety or radiation protection, bureaucrats are aware that they have to watch what they say if they want to keep their jobs. Just last week, a brigadier general was tossed off the National Security Council for suggesting that the coming 5G network be nationalized.

¶ The military is also in the mix. It’s an even bigger force in RF science than the telecoms. All modern weapon systems use RF radiation in one way or another. The U.S. Air Force and Navy are likely more worried about the NTP linking RF to cancer than anyone else. In 1984, the USAF’s Guy study showed that rats exposed to microwaves got cancer. It took *eight years* for those results to appear in a journal. By then, they were mostly forgotten.

¶ Many outsiders want to discredit the NTP findings. A well-documented example is the rumor mill at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm.

¶ When the brain cancer controversy began in the early 90’s, the major cell phone companies were Motorola, Nokia and Sony Ericsson. Today, the major players are Apple, Google and Microsoft, the high-tech darlings of Wall Street. Each has a capitalization approaching a *trillion* dollars (at least before the stock market started to tank last week). They run a massive lobbying operation in Washington and keep a low profile on RF. It’s hard to know what they are saying and doing.

¶ NIEHS has a long history of dropping the ball on EMFs and RF radiation. Years ago, long before cell phones, the late David Rall, the then director of NIEHS, predicted that microwaves would be the environmental challenge of the 21st century. He then immediately zeroed out the institute’s microwave research budget. (See our “Will NIEHS Ever ‘Get“ EMFs?” from 2010.)

Fittingly, the March 26-28 peer review of the NTP RF reports will be held in the David Rall building on the NIEHS campus.

For more on the NTP RF project, follow this link.

NTP, NIEHS, brain cell phones, John Bucher, Linda Birnbaum, Brian Berridge, Francis Collins, David Rall, Maria Feychting,

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