Interphone: U.K. "Telegraph" Jumps the Gun

October 28, 2009

Saturday's lead story in the *Telegraph* made believe that the U.K. daily had gotten hold of the much-delayed and much sought-after final results of the Interphone study — and that they showed that using a cell phone *does* indeed increase the risk of developing a brain tumor. Under the headline "Mobiles: New Cancer Alert," the newspaper proclaimed that, "Long-term use of mobile phones may be linked to some cancers, a landmark international study will conclude later this year." In its inside pages were a number of related stories, notably "People Must Be Told About Mobile Phone Dangers, Say Experts" and a sidebar about Larry Mills who had developed a tumor "exactly where he held the phone." The story was pitched as an "EXCLUSIVE" and was soon picked up by many other newspapers and Web sites.

In fact, the *Telegraph* had no scoop. Its reporters did not have an advance copy of the Interphone brain tumor paper. The story was mostly a rehash of what has already been disclosed —a lot of it a long time ago. For instance, quotes from Elisabeth Cardis, the head of Interphone, which ran three paragraphs on the front page, were exactly the same as had been reported in *Microwave News* back in June 2008 (see: "Interphone Project: The Cracks Begin To Show; Cardis Endorses Precaution").

Cardis was also quoted in the *Telegraph* as saying the Interphone paper would include a public health message. "I said of course there would be one," she told *Microwave News,* "We need to make a statement about the public health relevance of our findings." But, she added, she had also told the *Telegraph* that she was "not at liberty to discuss it or the results of the study." Cardis is with the Center for Research in Environmental Epidemiology (CREAL) in Barcelona.

The source of the *Telegraph* story remains unknown. (The obvious possibility is the newspaper's marketing department in a ploy to boost circulation.) "I have no clue what initiated this article,"

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Joachim Schüz told *Microwave News.* Schüz, the head of the German Interphone group, is now in Copenhagen at the Danish Cancer Society.

Two other members of the Interphone project have also stated that that there was no basis for the story. "There is, as far as I know, absolutely no information circulating at the moment that is accurate and correct with respects to the results of that study," Bruce Armstrong, the head of the Australian Interphone team at the University of Sydney, told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. Earlier this year, Armstrong gave a public lecture in which he said that the Interphone study is inconclusive but that the suggestion of a long-term risk prompted him to advise taking precautionary measures such as discouraging children from using mobile phones (see: "Cell Phone Link to Tumors? — "We Don't Know").

The harshest criticism of the *Telegraph* came from the Karolinska Institute's Maria Feychting, who leads the Swedish Interphone group. "It's unethical and astounding for this to be in the press before the study is completely and fully analyzed," she told the *Expressen,* a Swedish tabloid. Feychting also voiced her disagreement with the substance of the *Telegraph*'s story. "There is no indication that cell phones pose any health risk over the short term," she said. "In the long run, that is, for more than ten years, the data are less reliable."

When then can we expect to see the Interphone results? Ten months after the new director of IARC, Christopher Wild, made their release a high priority, that is still a matter of speculation (see "IARC Director Forces Publication of Interphone Brain Tumor Results"). When asked this question at a conference in Paris last week, Dan Krewski, of the University of Ottawa and a member of the Canadian Interphone team, replied that the paper is currently under review at a journal and that "hopefully" it would be available "this calendar year." But in the halls outside the lecture room, some expressed a less sanguine outlook. They predicted that the results would not be available until sometime in 2010.

Interphone, brain tumors, cell phones, cancer, Elisabeth Cardis, Joachim Schüz, Bruce Armstrong, Maria Feychting,

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