



A Report on Non-Ionizing Radiation

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2011 Short Takes

FDA OKs E-Field Device To Treat Brain Cancer

April 18, 2011

A system to treat brain cancer with 100-200 kHz electric fields has been approved by the FDA. The device is made by [Novocure](#). Here is the company's [press release](#) announcing the news. And here is a link to a [story about the the device](#), we ran in *Microwave News* close to four years ago.

Siddhartha Mukherjee on The Today Show

April 15, 2011

[Siddhartha Mukherjee](#) was a guest on this morning's *Today show*. He reiterated his view that "as of now the evidence that moderate cell phone use has any link to cancer is very weak" (see next item). The other guest, NBC's [Nancy Snyderman](#), the network's chief medical editor, was even more insistent. "We have, at least for now until something conclusive comes in, put this cell phone thing to rest" because, she said, "The science over and over and over again has not shown a link." Sounds clear, doesn't it.

Siddhartha Mukherjee's (& the *New York Times*' & NBC News') Questionable Sources

April 14, 2011
Updated December 16, 2023

Next Sunday, the *New York Times Magazine* will feature a long piece titled "[Do Cell Phones Cause Brain Cancer?](#)" by Siddhartha Mukherjee (it's already on the *Times*' Web site). It's a well-written article, as might be expected by his well-received book, *Emperor of*

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RECENT SHORT TAKES

[RF Animal Cancer Review Is #1](#)

[NTP Lite: All Good in Korea Too](#)

[NTP Lite: No Cancer Risk Seen in Japan](#)

[ElektrosmogReport Now in English Too](#)

[NCI 'Cancer Bioelectricity' Conference](#)

[Another WHO RF Review Challenged](#)

[Italy's 6 V/m RF Limit at Risk](#)

["NTP Lite": Update from Japan](#)

[Schwannoma Puzzle](#)

[Korean NTP Lite: Progress Report](#)

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All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer. Yet an important part of the story is missing: the politics of cell phone research, or more precisely the heavy hand of industry that controls much of what goes on and what gets done.

A few examples: Mukherjee cites, at some length, a 2005 review that concludes that a link between RF and cancer is “weak and unconvincing.” But he does not identify the [actual paper](#) or its four authors, other than calling them “experts” and noting their professional training (e.g., epidemiologist, radiation biologist, etc.).

Who are these people? Two are industry consultants who make money testifying that there are no hazards: The epidemiologist is [Linda Erdreich](#) of [Exponent](#), an industry-friendly consulting firm. A second is [John Moulder](#), the radiation biologist, who for many years has testified that all types of EMFs and RF radiation have no connection to cancer (see [“Radiation Research and The Cult of Negative Results”](#)). A third is [Ken Foster](#), a biomedical engineer, who has long pooh-pooed RF health risks and who argued, back in 1987, that it was [time to stop microwave health research](#) (hardly a prescient call!). The fourth is James McNamee of [Health Canada](#).

That 2005 paper was really little more than an ad for Erdreich’s and Moulder’s services to refute claims of possible risks: Come hire us if you get into an RF jam. Anyone with even a passing knowledge of RF radiation risks would have found a more reliable source. In fact, the editors at the *Times* were warned about the authors’ industry connections and that the paper was out of date, but they ran with it anyway.

Another example: Mukherjee points out that the work on RF-induced DNA breaks at the Medical University of Vienna was likely to have been “fraudulent.” Here again, no mention of any specifics. The [uncited paper](#) is from Hugo Rüdiger’s lab which has been the [target of a nasty smear campaign](#), perpetrated by industry allies. In fact, the study has been exhaustively investigated and no proof of fraud has ever come to light.

And another: Mukherjee refers to six animal experiments that failed to show a link between chronic radiation exposure and brain cancer. Once more, no details are given, but many of these studies were part of an industry project that used equipment that put the animals under so much stress that, even if there were a cancer risk, those exposure experiments could not have detected it. The crew running the project knew about this confounding, but hushed it up (see [“Wheel on Trial”](#)).

We could go on, but the point’s been made. We offer Mukherjee that good advice from Watergate’s Deep Throat, “Follow the Money.” Too bad he didn’t. If he had, he might have seen the other complexities of the cell phone cancer problem and would not have been so quick to suggest that it’s time to move on to more convincing health risks.

[April 15, 2011](#)

Siddhartha Mukherjee was a guest on this morning's Today show. He reiterated his view that "as of now the evidence that moderate cell phone use has any link to cancer is very weak." The other guest, NBC's [Nancy Snyderman](#), the network's chief medical editor, was even more insistent. "We have, at least for now until something conclusive comes in, put this cell phone thing to rest" because, she said, "The science over and over and over again has not shown a link."

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Mukherjee on Cancer Promotion

December 16, 2023

In this week's *New Yorker*, Siddhartha Mukherjee offers a more sophisticated look at cancer agents. His article, titled "[Sleeper Cells](#)" focuses on cancer promotion.

Here's the headline on the *New Yorker's* website:

ANNALS OF MEDICINE

ALL THE CARCINOGENS WE CANNOT SEE

We routinely test for chemicals that cause mutations. What about the dark matter of carcinogens—substances that don't create cancer cells but rouse them from their slumber?

By Siddhartha Mukherjee

December 11, 2023

"Cell Phone Radiation May Alter Your Brain. Let's Talk"

March 31, 2011

People undoubtedly love their cell phones. Yet there are also undercurrents of concern. Today's *New York Times* devotes more than a half-page to an article on strategies to protect against possible health risks. In "[Cell Phone Radiation May Alter Your Brain. Let's Talk](#)," Kate Murphy outlines ways to reduce radiation exposures—from using a headset or speakerphone (a good idea) to pendants and shields (save your money). The story has been both the #1 most e-mailed and the #1 most viewed story on the *Times* Web site all day.

April 2

This story has legs. It's still the most e-mailed story at the *Times*.

Cell Phones & Brain Tumors: Burying the Link

March 3, 2011

A couple of weeks ago, the University of Manchester in England issued a press release on a [new paper on brain cancer trends in the U.K.](#), under the headline, "Mobile Phone Use Not Related to Increased Brain Cancer Risk." Clear and catchy — but wrong. [Frank de Vocht](#) and two collaborators actually saw a statistically significant increase in the number of tumors of the temporal lobe between 1998 and 2007.

Though they go to great lengths to make us believe that the finding is of no importance, it's clearly on their minds. The paper cites the increase no fewer than six times in five pages of text (in the journal *Bioelectromagnetics*). They call the increase "small but systematic" and also concede that, if there were a response to RF radiation, it would likely be in the [temporal lobe](#), where the cell phone deposits the most radiation. Could it be a chance finding? That's unlikely, they say, because the trend was observed among both men and women. We should note that the [Institute of Occupational Medicine](#) in Edinburgh, home of [John Cherrie](#), one of de Vocht's coauthors, put out its own [press release](#) with the more appropriate title, "Is Brain Cancer Related to Mobile Phone Use?"

The bottom line, according to de Vocht and Cherrie and their third coauthor, [Igor Burstyn of Drexel University](#), is that there is nothing to worry about because, even if the association were valid, it would translate to only about 31 cases among the English population of 52 million. Could this be the beginning of a long-term trend? That's not likely, they believe —and here comes perhaps the strangest part of their argument— because the most likely average latency time between exposure and the manifestation of a brain tumor is 5-10 years. Most everyone else puts the latency at 20-30 years, or at the very least more than 10 years.

Their paper closes with a call to do nothing: There's no need to invoke the precautionary principle to reduce exposures, they say. The *Daily Mail*, a U.K. tabloid, dutifully reported the news with the headline "Using Mobile Phones 'Does Not Increase the Risk of Cancer'."

Hans Selye: Smoking Has Its Benefits!

February 17, 2011

[Hans Selye](#) (1907-1982) is widely credited as the first to study the biological and health effects of stress. It turns out that Selye, like so many others, was not adverse to downplaying the risks of smoking in exchange for some research money. In "The 'Father of Stress' Meets 'Big Tobacco': Hans Selye and the Tobacco Industry" —a paper published in the March issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*— [Mark Petticrew](#) and [Kelley Lee](#) of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine describe how Selye's research was used to "argue against a causal role for smoking in

coronary heart disease and cancer." They cite a [1966 memo from William Shinn](#), an attorney with the law firm [Shook, Hardy & Bacon](#), in which Shinn argues that Selye could be useful to the industry in a number of ways—for instance he could "emphasize the 'stressful' effect" of anti-smoking messages. Fast forward 45 years: as the cell phone controversy took off, a convenient school of thinking emerged, led by [Peter Wiedemann](#), a German researcher with ties to the mobile phone industry. It argues that [warnings about RF health risks do more harm than good](#) because people can get scared. All the while, Shook, Hardy continues to represent the tobacco industry and has added a number of cell phone companies to its client list, including [Motorola](#) and Sprint (see [MW/N, S/O02](#), p.9). Plus ça change...

Weak Magnetic Fields Lower Blood Pressure

February 11, 2011

One of the many disconnects in the EMF world is the difference in outlook between those concerned about hazards and those devising medical applications. Low-level effects, though routinely dismissed by those writing safety standards, are the bread and butter of biomedical innovators. A [new paper from Japan](#) provides a good example. [Tsutomu Nishimura](#) at the Kyoto University medical school reports in *Hypertension Research* that a 10-to-15-minute exposure to a 6-8 Hz magnetic field with a peak intensity of *only* 1 μT (10 mG) and a peak electric field of 10 V/m, once a week for four weeks, significantly lowered systolic blood pressure in human volunteers with mild-to-moderate hypertension. For comparison, the [ICNIRP](#) guidelines allow exposures that are more than a thousand times higher: up to 2500 μT (25,000 mG) and 20,000 V/m. To be sure, the Japanese results are preliminary and are based on a very small number of subjects, but the study had a randomized, double-blind design, the gold standard for these types of studies. Nishimura would like to see larger clinical trial to find out whether the effect holds up. If so, such EMF therapy could replace blood pressure-lowering drugs—and it would no doubt be safe because, as Nishimura points out, the field exposure "meets" the ICNIRP guidelines.

Kuster: BEMS Is a Society with a "Biased Scientific Culture"

February 4, 2011

Publication bias is a well-known problem—it's defined in a recent, widely read [New Yorker article](#) as "the tendency of scientists and scientific journals to prefer positive data over null results, which is what happens when no effect is found." This may be generally true, but once again, the usual rules don't apply to EMFs. Here researchers (and editors) are all too often more interested in publishing failures than successes. Actually, for EMFs, failure is success, promising financial rewards of one kind or another. This is

an old story, but now [Niels Kuster](#) says enough is enough. In a broadside against the [Bioelectromagnetics Society \(BEMS\)](#), Kuster warns that the society is "threatened" by its "biased scientific culture." Kuster, a former president of the society and the head of [IT'IS](#) in Zurich, writes on the front page of its newsletter that "BEMS members allow their conditioned assumptions, prejudices, funding interests or lack of expertise to influence their ability to review or accept positive findings objectively." Kuster tells of how long it took [Primo Schär](#) of the University of Basel to publish a [paper](#) showing that power-frequency EMFs can lead to DNA breaks, a finding first shown by [Henry Lai and N.P. Singh](#) close to 15 years ago. [Maria Scarfi](#) in Naples, on the other hand, was able to get her [failure to see a similar effect](#) into print with, as Kuster puts it, "relative ease." Scarfi placed her paper in *Radiation Research*, which has long favored null results for EMFs. So much so that years ago it was nicknamed the [journal of negative results](#). According to Kuster, BEMS is the society of negative results.

Cardis and Sadetzki Advise Precaution

January 25, 2011

"[I]ndications of an increased risk in high- and long-term users [of cell phones] from Interphone and other studies are of concern." This is the conclusion of a commentary, published yesterday in *Occupational Environmental Medicine* by [Elisabeth Cardis](#) and [Siegal Sadetzki](#). Cardis is the head of the [Interphone project](#) and Sadetzki is the leader of the Israeli Interphone group. As they have done in the past, Cardis and Sadetzki advise simple and inexpensive precautionary measures, particularly among young people, "until definitive scientific answers are available." (The [commentary](#) was open access but is no longer.)

More on Smart Meters

January 14, 2011

Here's the latest on the smart meter fight out West: "[Calif. Agency Mulls 'Opt Out' or Wired Substitutes as Fallout Over Smart Meters Persists](#)."