

Symposium Discussant: Asbestos and Cancer – Science and Policy Implications

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ISEE 2013 – Basel, Switzerland

August 19-23, 2013

Acknowledgments

- ★ **Joint Policy Committee of the Societies of Epidemiology and Chair, Dr. Stanley H. Weiss**
- ★ **Ms. Kathleen Ruff, RightOn Canada**
- ★ **Drs. Barry Castleman, Arthur Frank, and Richard Lemen**
- ★ **Disclosure: All of us, except KR, have served as expert witnesses in tort actions usually on the side of plaintiffs**

Summary – to convey in less than 6 minutes

- ★ First, **the problem** is that the asbestos industry, through Russia, is developing alarming ties with our highly-respected International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) in order to use IARC's good name to sell asbestos to the developing world.
- ★ Of the **18 concerns** we have already raised with IARC, I will briefly highlight only eight. I shared the full list with my co-discussants weeks ago so that they might have time to think about these issues in advance, too.
- ★ **My acknowledged colleagues and I have invited IARC** members/affiliates for a fuller discussion, to participate in a satellite meeting to the Collegium Ramazzini's "Ramazzini Days" in Carpi, Italy, October 27, 2013.

1. Bias in not utilizing more recent relative potency risk estimates

What is the justification for IARC, in its power-point presentation to the asbestos industry supporters attending the Kiev conference in November 2012, using the old (2000) Hodgson and Darnton risk comparisons of asbestos fiber types when the more recent figures (H&D, 2009/10) reduced the risk ratios of amphiboles:chrysotile by an order of magnitude? *(from 500:100:1 to 50:10:1)*

2. Misleading claim about exposure assessment

How can Russian epidemiology provide significantly important dose-response data on chrysotile asbestos, data that will augment what is now known based on data using PCM fiber counts? *The Russian exposure data is all in gravimetric measures for which reliable conversion to fiber counts is not possible.*

3. Can you count what you no longer measure?

In the late 1980s-mid-1990s, the reported incidence of mesothelioma cases in Russia plummeted from ~125 cases per year to ~30 cases per year in the late 1990s, and approached zero after 2000 (Ref: Kovaleskiy 2006 Rome conference paper, citing Kashansky 2006). This pattern is strikingly lower than in other countries; the steep trend down so soon also is unique and inexplicable given that the “substantial safeguards” are not alleged to have been implemented until recent years. *The fact that parts of the former Soviet Union have recently discontinued the coding of mesothelioma as its own ICD code would be one way of ensuring that mesothelioma deaths remain hidden from scrutiny.*

4. Questionable judgement in collaborating with a discredited entity

Ethical questions arise regarding the role of scientists involved in collaboration with IARC from the Russian institute (Scientific Research Institute of Occupational Health of the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences), *an institute that has been discredited by WHO over its involvement with the asbestos industry.*

5. Infiltration and collusion counter to the public interest

With regard to Dr. Kovalevskiy, IARC is assisting in covering up his role as an asbestos lobbyist, just as it helped cover up the fact that the Kiev conference was a sham conference, organised to sabotage the May 2013 recommendation of the Rotterdam Convention's scientific committee to list chrysotile asbestos.

Dishonesty also applies in that while his own study did demonstrate disease was caused by Russian chrysotile asbestos, he claimed that it did not!

6. Lack of transparency

IARC has not responded to the question put to it that the appointment of Dr. Kovalevskiy as a scientific collaborator on asbestos violates basic ethical standards.

7. Russia has taken over from Canada as the promoter of asbestos

The reality is that the global asbestos industry and its lobby organizations have for years spent countless millions of dollars on subverting and corrupting the scientific evidence. The Russian government has now taken over the role that the Canadian government played for so many years by *promoting disreputable scientists linked to the asbestos industry and its discredited industry-funded and industry-controlled research. Not one scientist in Russia is known to have publicly criticized the asbestos industry!*

8. Conflicting interests – perceived or real?

We wonder about the conflicted situation IARC is placed in by virtue of Russia only recently paying its annual IARC dues as well as back-dues, *likely millions of dollars.*

End ...
- Discussion



Lenses through which we may apply our training

★ Macro-level lens

- *Overview from an elevation of ~10,000 meters*
ALWAYS EXAMINING EVIDENCE FOR CAUSAL JUDGMENTS

★ Meso-level lens

- *Higher-level view from an elevation of ~100 meters*

★ Micro-level lens

- *On the ground from an elevation of ~1 meter*
ALWAYS CALLING FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

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Hill concludes ...

- ★ **“All Scientific work is incomplete – whether it be observational or experimental. All scientific work is liable to be upset or modified by advancing knowledge. That does not confer upon us a freedom to ignore the knowledge we already have, or to postpone the action that it appears to demand at a given time.”**