Interphone Rumors Run Rampant

October 20, 2008

A spate of spurious stories that were in the news last week needs to be aired and corrected. They also provide yet another reason to get the Interphone study out as soon as possible.

Le Soir, one of Belgium's leading French-language newspapers, kicked it off on the 15th. "GSM Is Carcinogenic" ran the headline at the top of its front page. The paper based its scoop on what it called the first results of the Interphone study, adapted from the latest project update, which had been posted on IARC's Web site the previous week. In fact, they were really old news. The last update, issued in February, had already included those results that point to a tumor risk —they were far from conclusive, however. As Elisabeth Cardis, the coordinator of Interphone, later confirmed to *Microwave News,* "There is nothing new in terms of risk in that [October] update." In two follow-on stories in its inside pages, *Le Soir* took a more measured tone, noting that these new "disturbing" results need to be confirmed. Cardis, now at CREAL in Barcelona, told the paper: "We must remain cautious in the interpretation of the Interphone results." Her words stand in contrast to the less than cautious warning on page one.

By the following day, the "news" had crossed the North Sea and been amplified by a couple of U.K. papers. "Mobile phones do increase the risk of brain cancer," stated both the *Telegraph* and the *Sun.* The papers ran identical quotes from Cardis: "To underestimate the risk would be a complete disaster." This did not fit with what Cardis has said in the past and was even inconsistent with her interview with *Le Soir.* Not surprisingly, Cardis told us that the quote was wrong. She disavowed it.

We saw Cardis at a workshop hosted by the Swiss national EMF research program in Zurich earlier this month, where she gave a talk, in which she cited her latest project: the soon-to-be-funded MOBI-Kids, an 11-country study on the possible carcinogenic effects of mobile phones on children and adolescents. As we always do, we asked when the Interphone results would be

submitted for publication. We got the now-standard answer. "Soon," she said. Cardis seemed genuinely candid and we believed her.

We hope Cardis is right this time and that we aren't being too credulous. Otherwise the rumor mills will continue to spew out more nonsense about what we do and do not know about the consequences of long-term cell phone use. It's easy to blame the press, but equally responsible are those members of the project who have been arguing about how to present the results for three long years without reaching consensus.

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