

ACSH Dispatches Round-Up: Month Ends Scares Go On

January 7, 2008: A Long Way, Baby, Albeit While Coughing

- Quote to Note: A man may take out a woman who smokes for a good time, but he won't marry her, and if he does, he won't stay married. --A 1914 Washington Post editorial.

- Did you know that it used to be illegal for women to smoke? Neither did several ACSH staffers. In the early part of the twentieth century, women could get expelled from college for smoking, and policemen would warn a woman if they saw her taking a puff on the side of the road. Smoking cigarettes used to be taboo for women.

So what changed? The advertising and marketing of cigarettes did.

Edward Bernays, in particular, created a campaign to start women smoking -- and it worked wonders. One example the Wall Street Journal recounted

Bernays hiring of models walking in an Easter parade to smoke as they strolled down Fifth Avenue. Dr. Whelan, though, remembers a different part of Bernays' life -- in the 1950s, he went on to work for an anti-smoking organization.

- It's rare to read anything negative about going green. But in the Business section of the New York Times on Saturday, an article suggested that recycling could be bad for your health. One woman is described as distraught

A (BPA).

At least the article did have a brief reality check, ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava points out. It quoted Lynn R. Goldman, professor of environmental health at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, who explained that phthalates are leached in barely discernable amounts and are not a danger. We only wish the Times was more clear about the actual safety

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross explained that the reason we need to get inoculated every year is because an antigen in the virus changes annually. This new flu vaccine would strike not at the antigen but instead at a conserved region of all influenza A (the yearly flu) strains. While the drug is only in phase one of testing, if it continues to prove effective Dr. Ross predicts this universal vaccine may be available in five years. The new vaccine, if all goes according to plan, might also protect against avian influenza (bird flu).

- Feel like a smoke? Don't bother going to Wegmans Food Market -- it has taken cigarettes

ACSH staffers believe the move is a great one for public health -- we're all for making the deadly poison of cigarettes less available. While we suspect Wegmans did not choose to stop selling cigarettes purely for public health reasons (it probably has more to do with fines from accidental sale of cigarettes to underage persons), we're still pleased with the end result.

January 8, 2008: More Sun, Autism, Viruses, and Drug Spending

- Quote to Note: Parents of autistic children should be reassured that autism in their child did not occur through immunizations. --Dr. Eric Fombonne of Montreal Children's Hospital.

- Do we really need another study telling us that thimerosal in vaccines does not cause autism? We didn't think so, but in response to ACSH's Top 10 Unfounded Health Scares of 2007 a reader from Canada named Michael wrote that our saying thimerosal-containing vaccines don't cause autism is a serious and dangerous distortion of the truth. So it seemed fitting that today we read about a report from the California Department of Public Health that provided more proof that childhood vaccines with mercury-containing thimerosal as a preservative

The report found that the number of autism cases in California from 1995 to 2007 continued to rise even though thimerosal was removed from almost all children's vaccines in 2001.

How much more evidence do we need? ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan asked. People like Michael from Canada seem to know a lot of things that are not so, Dr. Whelan continued. They have firmly held views and do not want to be distracted by the facts.

- Just when we've finally gotten used to wearing hats, SPF 45 sunscreen, and avoiding the sun like the plague, details of a new study make it not quite so clear these are the right things to do. Researchers from the Institute for Cancer Research in Oslo says that for some people the health benefits from the sun outweigh the risk of skin cancer, and more exposure to the sun is not only good for us but also

England by storm -- thousands are going to the hospital for its symptoms of vomiting and diarrhoea -- but so far there's no reported outbreak in the United States. Except, of course, in oysters. The FDA is warning consumers not to eat raw oysters harvested from West Karako Bay in Louisiana, as they may be contaminated

The news stories about this focus on how increasing prescription drug prices are the root of this rise in health care cost, but here at ACSH we consider this a distortion. Prescription drugs may be expensive, but broadly speaking they're extremely cost effective. For instance, it's much less expensive to reduce risk of cardiovascular disease with a statin than to have a triple bypass surgery in the future. It's a real shame the mainstream media never mention that side of the story.

January 9, 2008: Consumption, Prevention, Infection, and Preemption

Quote to Note: The decision to allow a new drug on the market should be the FDA's. The decision to prescribe it should belong to the doctor and patient. These decisions should not involve tort lawyers and juries. --ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross in his op-ed on TCSDaily.com.

- An ACSH adviser once said that his motto for keeping HDL cholesterol levels high and lowering risk for heart disease was Run from bar to bar. It seems a recent study backs up this advice -- moderate drinking, in combination with exercise, reduces risk

Our resident marathon runner Jeff Stier pointed out that the organization Hash House Harriers really has taken run from bar to bar to heart -- the non-competitive running group refers to itself as a drinking group with a running problem, Stier told us.

- Also in today's news, we read a list of tough questions to ask our surgeon before any procedure. One of these questions is whether or not the surgeon is addicted to alcohol or drugs. This poses the question of how we ask something so sticky of a doctor in whose hands we have placed ourselves?

I feel as though I am at his mercy, Dr. Whelan said, explaining why she finds it uncomfortable even asking a doctor if he's washed his hands.

Dr. Betsy McCaughey, who joined us for breakfast this morning, pointed out that there are ways of easing into these questions, for instance by simply stating how important it is for you to have a doctor who washes his hands. Dr. McCaughey, an ACSH Trustee and chairwoman of the Committee to Reduce Infection Deaths

Cheez-it.

So why did he support banning of trans fats in New York City restaurants?

Speaking of trans fats, we wonder if Health Commissioner Dr. Thomas Frieden will make a statement about the good news that deaths in New York City are going down. We anticipate he'll try to attribute this decline to the trans fat ban -- which of course is absurd. In fact, it may well have to do with the major decline in New York City smoking rates that was recently announced.

- When we read that there are additional benefits for statins

ACSH staffers were not all that surprised. This concept is nothing new to us -- we've long been considering creating a paper about how helping cardiovascular health is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to statin benefits.

Researchers from the Veterans Affairs Boston Healthcare System found that statins may reduce the risk for prostate, lung, and colorectal cancer. (Our guest Dr. McCaughey suggested we call our future publication Breaking Through the Statin Quo.)

We hear all this negative news about pharmaceutical companies, but it's rare to hear the great amount of positives that can also come from the drugs they innovate, Dr. Whelan noted.

- Finally, make sure to check out Dr. Gil Ross's op-ed on the supremacy of FDA preemption over state courts

TCSDaily. He writes how the Supreme Court should establish the general principle that drug makers can't be sued for unforeseen side effects that emerge after drugs have received FDA approval.

January 10, 2008: Important Bogus Solutions Offered on Fat, Cancer, and Menopause

- Quote to Note: Why should children have a psychoactive drug in a beverage? --CSPI's Bruce Silverglade on the defensive about his group's effort to curb advertising in sugar-containing soft drinks, allegedly as a solution to our obesity crisis.

- This morning on the Fox Business Channel, ACSH's Jeff Stier took on CSPI's Bruce Silverglade about CSPI's proposed initiative to have the government restrict advertising of sugar-containing soda. Stier countered Silverglade very effectively, referring to his proposal as radical and extreme and one that will do little or nothing to help lower obesity rates. ACSH staffers also wondered why Silverglade doesn't believe we should promote diet soda instead?

What irked ACSH staffers most about the debate was that Silverglade went beyond his premise of how soda consumption is causing obesity in order to attack everything he finds wrong with the beverages. It shows he's not really interested in obesity, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan points out. He also attacks soda for containing caffeine, which Silverglade derides as a psychoactive drug. What does that have to do with obesity, we wonder?

- The FDA is finally warning against so-called bio-identical hormone therapy, U.S. health officials announced

As ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava asked, What took them so long?

Bio-identical hormone replacement therapy is a so-called alternative therapy for women with menopausal symptoms, the most famous subscriber to the treatment being former actress and self-promoting author Suzanne Somers. The FDA is now telling American women that these drugs have not been tested or approved and offer no benefits over FDA-approved hormone replacement drugs.

What I find so remarkable is that in this risk-averse age, why would women take these drugs that are just whipped together by their pharmacists and not FDA-approved? Dr. Whelan asked. Dr. Kava wondered if women think this is safer because they see these bio-identicals as more natural and as drugs made just for me. Either way, it's about time the FDA injected some sense into the debate.

- Here at ACSH we were astounded at the high number of shingles cases per year -- 1 million people come down with the painful illness in the United States

This number serves as a reminder what a miracle the new herpes zoster (shingles) vaccine could be, if all those for whom it's recommended do get inoculated. Dr. Whelan also pointed out that even though it's an expensive vaccine (the cost can be between \$200-\$300), with 1 million people falling victim to the disease each year, it's extremely cost-effective.

- Unlike the Shingles vaccine, here's a new development that won't help anyone: asparaginase. The enzyme is meant to reduce the amount of acrylamide

Here at ACSH we find the advertising of this product laughable. They've come out with a marketable solution for a non-problem, Dr. Whelan pointed out. Acrylamide is a chemical produced when carbohydrate-rich foods are cooked at high temperatures (such as frying or grilling). Scientists associated with ACSH have found no evidence

Well, at least they came up with a catchy title for this unneeded substance: Acrylaway.

January 11, 2008: Fighting Birth Defects, Breast Tumors, and Alzheimer's

- Quote to Note: The Worcestershire Acute Hospitals Trust says it is cancelling all non-urgent operations until 9 January because of what it calls the unrelenting pressure caused by the virus. --A BBC report about norovirus, a stomach virus.

- Here at ACSH we usually skim over headlines that claim cures to incurable diseases. But the news story about an elderly patient with Alzheimer's

showing almost immediate cognitive improvement upon treatment caught our eyes. The treatment was an intra-spinal injection of a powerful anti-inflammatory drug, etanercept. The findings, published in the *Journal of Neuroinflammation*, are obviously nothing that people can comfortably rely on yet, but it has great implications for future progress toward finding a treatment for Alzheimer's. Any effective treatment would be welcome, as this condition is increasingly common in our aging population. ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross said that doctors have hypothesized that anti-inflammatory drugs may help an Alzheimer patient's cognition. We are excited and curious to see the future of etanercept -- which has been used for years to treat rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis.

- In other we-don't-quite-believe-it news, reports that scientists can distinguish healthy women from those with benign breast tumors and those with malignant breast tumors by testing for particular proteins in patients' saliva

The concept is fascinating -- and if this is shown to be an accurate test we can think of many benefits, including lower cost and greater convenience (this could even be an at-home test).

When it comes to catching breast cancer, you want to find it in its earliest stage. ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan noted that it's hard to believe that this saliva test can be as reliable as a mammogram.

- More women between the ages of eighteen and forty-five

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report. The percentage of women in that age range who are taking supplements of folic acid -- an important nutrient that helps prevent some major birth defects -- rose from 28 in 1995 to 40 last year. Still, only 30% of women between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four are taking supplements -- a number the CDC, and ACSH staffers, consider too low.

Fortification of flour and cereals with folic acid led to a dramatic decrease of birth defects in the United States. Is it time for an even higher rate of fortification, Dr. Whelan wondered aloud?

- Almost 3 million people in the UK have been infected and doctors estimate more than 100,000 people a week

But the wave of sickness is making virtually no news in the United States. Clearly this outbreak is significant, Dr. Whelan noted. It's odd that mainstream U.S. media haven't covered this story.

January 14, 2008: Kissing, Pain, Morality, Death, and Vomit

- Quote to Note: People avoid kissing each other when they have a cold, but in fact they are more likely to pass on an infection by shaking someone's hand. --Professor Sally Bloomfield, from the London School of Hygiene and the chairman of the International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene.

- When ACSH's Jeff Stier saw a commercial for Lyrica last week, what struck him was the opening line: Fibromyalgia is a real, widespread pain condition. The ad is a rare case in which a drug company is defending the existence of a disease.

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross, whose field is rheumatology, said that there's been a problem about the terminology of diagnosing fibromyalgia since he was in training. Some very respected rheumatologists say it's simply a constellation of nondescript pain, Dr. Ross explained. One of those who is skeptical that fibromyalgia is a real disease is one of ACSH's advisors, Dr. George Ehrlich, who is quoted today in a *New York Times*

Dr. Ross said he believes the debate over calling fibromyalgia a disease is related to both semantics and insurance coverage, as well as the lack of any specific diagnostic test. If patients come in with vague, aching pain all over, as well as other non-specific symptoms, calling this syndrome fibromyalgia will increase the chances of having health insurance cover the treatments, a benefit for both the doctor and the patient.

- This weekend in the *New York Times* magazine we were surprised (and delighted!) to see a familiar name in an article about conscience. The author, Steven Pinker, poses this question: Which of the following people would you say

Mother Teresa, Bill Gates, or Norman Borlaug? (Mr. Pinker leans heavily towards Dr. Borlaug, as do we here at ACSH.) ACSH staffers are, as always, happy to see Dr. Borlaug's many accomplishments as father of the Green Revolution promoted. Nobel Peace Prize winner and ACSH friend and trustee, Dr. Borlaug has been credited with saving more than one billion lives.

- As a public health devotee, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan and many other ACSH staffers make a point to always read the obituaries -- they provide great insight to the health of the American population. On Sunday, Dr. Whelan couldn't help but notice one of the deaths

Eddie Bozo Miller. Despite the fact that when he entered the Guinness World Records book (by eating 27 roast chickens, of 2 pounds each, in one sitting in 1963) he weighed 280 pounds and was consuming 25,000 calories a day, he lived to be 89 years old.

So much for the arguments of restrictive diet proponents, ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava said half-jokingly.

This past year (as well as in years prior) we've heard how nearly everything Miller did could kill him -- eating processed meat (Miller performed disappearing hot dog tricks), drinking excessively (supposedly Miller once consumed an entire bottle of gin in one chug), and being obese (while his weight fluctuated, at one point Miller weighed 330 pounds). Still, he almost lived to 90. Now that's food for thought (but still not, on average, a good idea).

- The norovirus keeps spreading in England -- now the count is more than 3 million cases. That's the equivalent, percentage-wise, of having 15 million cases in the United States, Dr. Whelan noted. It's incredible.

She continued to point out how she gets multiple Google news alerts from U.S. newspapers about acrylamide and aspartame every day but none about norovirus. The hype about acrylamide and aspartame is just that -- hype -- while norovirus is a legitimate health issue.

ACSH staffers wondered why there is no U.S. media coverage. Perhaps because no one is dying from the virus, someone postulated. Mumps doesn't kill people, Dr. Ross said. But if there was a mumps outbreak in England we'd be hearing about it.

We can only hope coverage begins before the virus hits the United States in full force because from England we can learn more about how to be better prepared for it. For now, though, we'll take the advice of a London doctor

This advice seems especially relevant as Valentine's Day approaches.

January 15, 2008: Small Studies, Dubious Witnesses, Bug Diets, and Natural Cancer

- Quote to Note: There are some 1,400 edible insects, which can enrich and diversify our food supply. --Arnold van Huis, an entomology professor in Wageningen, the Netherlands.

- Today, news broke about newly published study results on the cholesterol drug Vytorin. The results call Vytorin's efficacy into question, and ACSH staffers struggled with the complex issue.

This is bad news for the pharmaceutical companies Merck and Schering-Plough (which have a joint venture that markets both Vytorin and Zetia) as well as bad news for consumers. In a press release, Merck and Schering-Plough said the study showed that Vytorin failed to slow the accumulation of fatty plaque in the arteries and actually seemed to contribute to plaque formation (but by a very small amount).

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross quickly pointed out that the study was very small and should not be taken as definitive -- the end of the story is not in sight yet. While ACSH doesn't believe the study proves anything, we are disappointed that Merck and Schering-Plough took so long -- almost two years -- to publish the study results, repeatedly missing deadlines to do so. All the while, millions of patients continued to take Vytorin.

Before a drug like Vytorin is taken off the market, larger studies must be conducted. Merck and Schering-Plough are even now conducting these studies, which will detect if the combination drug, Vytorin, actually reduces cardiovascular outcomes (heart attack and stroke). We hope that they publish their results promptly this time.

- Can something natural hurt you? Two men thought not and took herbal supplements to boost sexual performance and grow bigger muscles. A few months later, both men developed aggressive and incurable prostate cancer.

Two cases do not causation make, but the concept piqued ACSH staffers' interest. University of Texas Southwestern medical school doctors reported in the journal *Clinical Cancer Research* that the herbal supplement contained two hormones, testosterone and estradiol. The combination likely fueled the growth of prostate cancer cells

Need your protein fix? Want to enhance sustainability of the planet? Next time you're hungry, reach for the nearest insect. An entomology professor in the Netherlands wants us to start eating insects. The professor, Arnold van Huis, cites the high protein levels, essential fatty acids, and important vitamins in caterpillars, beetle larvae, and grasshoppers. He even provides a recipe

Maybe ACSH staffers just have queasy stomachs, but we are a bit skeptical.

I'm sure insects are a delicacy if they're cooked right, said ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross. He paused, looked around at the grimaces still on other staffers' faces, and quickly added, And if you don't know what you're eating.

- And finally, another victory for sound science -- a Maryland judge found that thimerosal in vaccines does not cause or contribute to neurodevelopmental disorders such as autism in an alleged vaccine injury case.

ACSH staffers were very impressed -- not only did the judge say that thimerosal doesn't cause autism, he also ruled to preclude expert witnesses who were to testify

In our opinion, this marks a great victory against junk science, and we applaud the judge for going along with the overwhelming scientific evidence that there is no link between vaccines and autism.

January 16, 2008: Clones, Cancers, and Allergies

- Quote to Note: An organic peanut is just as allergenic as one grown by high-tech means -- indeed, it may eventually be more so. --ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava in her New York Times letter to the editor.

- All over the news today is the FDA's announcement that meat and milk from cloned animals present no health or safety risk to American consumers. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava tuned into the Today show this morning to hear its coverage. While overall the Today show presented an unbiased report, Dr. Kava said she took some issue with medical correspondent Dr. Nancy Snyderman's remark that labeling cloned meat is all about choice -- that consumers want to know what they're eating and have a right to know.

On an emotional level, I understand that, Dr. Kava explained. But at the same time I could say as a consumer I only want to eat wheat grown in Kansas and insist that all wheat be labeled. Where do you draw the line? I think it should be drawn based on the scientific evidence, not on demands drummed up by activists.

In the end, ACSH applauds the FDA for making a decision based on a thorough review of the scientific data rather than kowtowing to fears promulgated by so-called alarmist consumer groups.

- In the New York Times obituary section, ACSH staffers were saddened to learn of the death

Dr. Judah Folkman, a cancer researcher. Dr. Folkman is best known for his theory that cancer tumors can be kept in check by cutting off the supply of blood they need to grow.

The obit noted that there was some controversy surrounding Dr. Folkman's work due to a front-page article in the New York Times that quoted Dr. James Watson, who discovered DNA, saying Judah is going to cure cancer in two years. Clearly, he did not.

This example serves as an important lesson, ACSH's Jeff Stier pointed out. Dr. Folkman made a very important discovery, but progress in science and medicine are often very slow-moving. That's a concept people should keep in mind, Stier noted. Breathless claims can damage the credibility of the underlying science.

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross agreed that Dr. Folkman's contributions may be very valuable in the long term, but for now the drugs that have been developed using Dr. Folkman's idea of cutting off blood supply to tumors doesn't do much to extend life expectancy of cancer patients. The concept, though, is still in its infancy and likely to prove very potent.

- Finally, make sure to check out Dr. Kava's letter to the editor

New York Times dining section. Her letter addresses the fallacy that organic foods may be less allergenic.

January 17, 2008: Fibers, Pharma PCBs, Popcorn, and Kids

- Quote to Note: To me, it is a nightmare. We are just feeding off of this cancer phobia. --Dr. Peter C. Albertsen, a surgery professor and prostate cancer specialist at the University of Connecticut, on excessive prostate-cancer screening resulting in too much treatment.

- Today marked a bad day for the pharmaceutical industry -- virtually every story splashed across the news was less than laudatory. First, there were new analyses on the ENHANCE study about Vytorin, mostly critical of Merck and Schering-Plough.

ACSH's Jeff Stier pointed out that the ENHANCE study raises questions regarding what the burden is for companies to distribute studies that may hold negative news about their drugs. Pharmaceutical companies are businesses -- their goal, whether we like it or not, is not to educate the public, it's to make money. They can choose to publicize positive studies on their drugs and hold back the negative ones, so long as they submit all information to the FDA. Although it's right to see pharmaceutical companies as businesses, consumers are understandably troubled by the idea that you may have difficulty learning about the negatives of a drug you are taking.

- In other news about drug companies, the FDA issued a warning today to parents, telling them not to give cold medicines to children under the age of two. On the Today show, medical correspondent Dr. Nancy Snyderman discussed how parents often don't look at the active ingredients on medicine labels. If they then give their children more than one cold medicine, they could accidentally overdose them, ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava explains.

Still, the bigger issue is that these cold medicines don't really help children under the age of two. Given that there is no benefit to justify risk, there's no reason to give your children these medicines, Stier pointed out.

- The latest addendum to the popcorn disease debacle from earlier this year is that the man who developed popcorn lung after eating multiple bags of popcorn every day for a decade filed a lawsuit. The plaintiff, Wayne Watson, developed a rare lung disease that has been linked to the chemical diacetyl found in microwaveable popcorn. The chemical was at the center of lawsuits several years ago filed by factory workers who also developed the popcorn lung disease.

This highlights the distinction between occupational exposure and environmental exposure, Stier explained. When does environmental exposure (the kind Watson had by eating the popcorn daily) become comparable to high-level occupational exposure (the kind the workers had)? While it has been shown that at very high occupational levels diacetyl can cause this rare lung disease, with the current data available ACSH staffers are not convinced Watson's exposure is at a high enough level. Certainly factory workers inhaled significantly more diacetyl than someone eating two bags a day for ten years.

It's not as simple an issue as it looks, though -- Watson may have had a genetic propensity toward this disease, for instance. And the outcome could have a huge effect on future cases. Either way, we're curious how the lawsuit will play out in the courts.

- The newest medical mystery comes in the patriotic colors of blue and red -- and in the form of fibers under a person's skin. Morgellons disease is an unexplained condition that causes people to feel as though they have these fibers growing

Is this a psychiatric thing? one ACSH staffer asked. Some doctors are convinced it is purely psychiatric, Dr. Kava said. The only thing ACSH staffers could think of that sounds similar to Morgellons are some parasitical diseases where worms are underneath the skin and need to be removed. Still, Dr. Kava noted, in those cases the worms are painful. No one with Morgellons mentions pain.

- Finally, we must chastise Reuters for publishing unscientific articles two days in a row.

Yesterday, Reuters ran a story on women who take calcium pills and their risk of heart disease, an article in which Reuters was fear-mongering, but they didn't give the reader enough information on the study -- such as study size and other variables -- so as to better evaluate the results, Dr. Kava explains.

Today, Reuters published the non-story of finding PCBs in floor polish from the 1950s and 1960s. What's the purpose of bringing this to our attention? ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan asked. It's completely irrelevant! We wonder what we are expected to do with this new information -- rip up our wood floors? Not eat off our wood floors? Move to a home where the wood floors are new?

The article shows that bad news is a commodity for Reuters, Dr. Whelan explained.

January 18, 2008: Chicken, Ultrasound, Sledgehammers, Lead, and Tapioca

- Quote to Note: The law is being abused in a way that could mislead consumers...to change their cooking habits and cause greater health risks. Undercooked chicken is not healthy, --Jot Condie, the California Restaurant Association's president and chief executive, about an attempt to use California's Prop. 65 to mandate that restaurants place warnings on grilled chicken.

- Navigating through the unregulated marketplace for drugs and medical treatments is like traveling in uncharted territory. Reading about high-intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU), a treatment for prostate cancer unapproved in the United States but available in Mexico, Latin America, and Canada, reminded us the danger

You can't tell the difference between the quacks and the frauds with these unapproved treatments, ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross noted. At first read, HIFU reminds us of laetrile, a supposed cancer remedy that contains a naturally occurring plant compound. There is the case of Chad Green, a child with acute lymphocytic leukemia in the late 1970s who was treated in Mexico with laetrile, a treatment that led to his premature death, a warning to many about the dangers of non-FDA-approved procedures and drugs relative to standard treatments for diseases. But HIFU appears to have a lot of advocates.

The most important question is Does it work? , noted ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross. While ACSH is not recommending this treatment for anyone, we're not writing it off as quackery quite yet; after all, it's been approved in Canada and the EU. But before booking any trips to doctors in Puerto Vallarta, wait for published clinical trials.

- The news that the increase in popularity of genetic tests concerns a federal advisory panel

ACSH about the difficulty in striking the right balance when regulating science. Often science progresses before a regulatory scheme can be put in place. By the time regulators catch up, examples of abuse abound. And then, as regulators tend to do, they use a sledgehammer when only a gentle tap is needed. The result: overregulation. That's what happened, for example, with genetically modified food.

- We joke a lot about how Proposition 65 is going to require California to place warning labels on all foods and products, but even we were a bit surprised when we read that a group is trying to use the law to require labels

Clearly, according to PCRM (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine) -- a vegan group masquerading as a professional health organization -- eating raw chicken is the healthier option when faced with chemicals in grilled meat. As former President Ulysses S. Grant once said, the best way to get rid of a bad law is to strictly enforce it.

- Martha Stewart probably thought she'd seen the last of courtrooms, but a Pennsylvania couple seems intent on ushering her back into one. The parents are filing a lawsuit that alleges their children were poisoned by lead in dinnerware that is part of Martha Stewart's Everyday line

This seems like a bit of a reach. One ACSH staffer joked that perhaps this means trans fats make all prostate cancers non-aggressive and should be praised.

January 22, 2008: Post-Phone Sleep and the Calorie-Count Crackdown

- Quote to Note: It is unfortunate that we are at the point that the restaurant industry, or parts of it, are so ashamed of what they are serving that they'd rather go to court than put the information where people would actually see it. --New York City Health Commissioner Thomas Frieden.

- Today, the New York City Board of Health will vote to require restaurants to post calorie counts on menu boards, an action ACSH staffers view

This is a perfect example of public health getting mixed up with anti-industry contempt, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan pointed out. Instead of attacking the entire food industry, though, the Board of Health's new rules will only apply to approximately 10% of venues, chains that have fifteen or more restaurants in the city. The thing is that for many of these restaurants calorie information is already widely available -- on restaurant websites as well as on tray liners and posters (think McDonald's and Subway). If it's not helping consumers when it's on the wall, how is it going to help when it's on

the menu board?

In order for such information to be useful to consumers, they would have to know what their daily caloric needs are, stated Dr. Whelan. Otherwise these are just additional numbers that serve to confuse rather than to enlighten restaurant patrons.

- One of the latest over-hyped studies of the weekend was one claiming that cell phones cause sleep problems. Look a little closer though, and you'll see the study results are actually being misinterpreted. For instance, one part of the study looked at teens who talked on their cell phones before going to bed, but did researchers bother to compare them to teens who talked on regular phones before bed? ACSH staffers believe that it's not the cell phone that causes any problems but the act of talking on the phone before trying to fall asleep.

- A perennial story resurfaced this weekend in full force -- caffeine and pregnancy problems. A new study suggests

This issue comes up so often -- I remember hearing about it in grad school, ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava said. Even though there is scant medical evidence that supports this conclusion, certain scientists refuse to let the idea go, so they conduct test after test after test, occasionally getting an apparent confirmation, usually getting nothing.

As if women aren't confused enough by the results, another study was released this weekend tying caffeine consumption to a lower risk

What is one to think?

- Last week ACSH's Jeff Stier happened to read an article in the Pittsburgh City Paper and learned that author Dr. Devra Davis slammed ACSH and the esteemed scientist Dr. Bruce Ames. Dr. Davis is the expert who wrote the so-called truth about the cancer epidemic -- a book titled *The Secret History on the War on Cancer*. In it, Dr. Davis claims big government and industry knew secrets of cancer decades ago and did nothing about it -- leading to more than 10 million preventable cancer deaths.

Besides our annoyance that Dr. Davis referred to ACSH as an innocuous-sounding group funded by the chemical industry (we are not), we were taken aback that she referred to Dr. Bruce Ames, a prominent Berkeley professor of molecular and cell biology and the man who created the Ames test, as simply a guy from California.

- Finally, make sure to read the op-ed by ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross on [MedicalProgressToday](#)

Vytorin.

January 23, 2008: Celebrity Depression, Lung Cancer, Calories, E. Coli, and Mercury

- Yesterday ACSH staffers learned with sadness about the death of Heath Ledger. He was only twenty-eight years old. Details are still hazy, but first accounts cite drug overdose as a probable cause of death. If this fine young actor did consider suicide and it was related to depression, it's a terrible tragedy. Depression is a devastating condition, but here at ACSH we'd like to take this moment of sadness to point out that effective and safe antidepressants

Radiation therapy is an extremely beneficial procedure to help ensure breast cancer does not return after a lumpectomy, but yesterday we learned that for women who are cigarette smokers and have had this radiation therapy, the risk for developing lung cancer ten or more years in the future is increased thirty-nine-fold.

We cannot imagine how we'd feel if we had already been treated with radiation for breast cancer -- and we smoked. Even if women quit smoking before the radiation therapy they may still incur the same risks. Now physicians are going to have to weigh the risks and benefits of post-surgical radiation with patients who are or have been smokers.

This is just chilling, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan said. Who knew? You think you know all the dangers of smoking, as documented in the ACSH book *Cigarettes: What the Warning Label Doesn't Tell You*

When it comes to E. coli, the media -- and ACSH staffers -- tend to focus on the here-and-now: Who gets sick and from what. We don't follow the cases, don't think about future health issues. When we read about how food poisoning from a bad strain of E. coli can lead not only to immediate

sickness but also

As we've said repeatedly, we must prevent E. coli infections from ever occurring, using the best means available. Irradiation of foods that are frequent E. coli carriers is one potential solution, but, sadly, no one seems to turn to it because of irrational fears (in reality, food irradiation simply kills pathogens -- it does not introduce a hazard

The first question to pop into our heads as we perused the chart the Times provided was, how can mercury levels in tuna be so different in various stores around New York City? Dr. Kava pointed out that each probably gets its fish from a different source.

ACSH must point out, though, that the FDA and EPA action level of mercury is hyper-conservative -- just because the levels were above the EPA standard does not mean

New York Times to retract the article. The group's director, David Martosko, also pointed out the unmentioned ten-fold safety factor in the FDA's reference dose and states that a consumer would actually have to eat twenty-six pieces of contaminated sushi per week (over an entire lifetime) before he accumulates the lowest level of mercury in his body associated with adverse health effects in scientific studies.

- The New York City Board of Health yesterday passed the mandate that calorie content be posted on the menus of restaurants that have fifteen or more locations in New York City.

ACSH is greatly disappointed in this latest development in public health. At least one ACSH staffer pointed out that fast-food restaurants may contribute to the obesity epidemic currently plaguing America (although that is purely speculative), but there is no evidence that these additional mandatory postings will help. Yes, when consumers see 2,000 calories for a meal on a menu board, most are going to realize this is probably a poor nutrition choice to make (unless of course they are athletes or otherwise in need of substantially more calories than the majority of us). But because this requirement only reaches a small percentage of New York City restaurants -- about 10% -- consumers may falsely believe that restaurants that aren't required to post calories are healthier. The consumer who chooses to avoid eating a 2,000 calorie burger may walk to a nearby deli and choose an equally-caloric chicken salad sandwich, all the while thinking he is making the smart and healthy choice.

This puts a Scarlet A on the fast food restaurants and gives the false impression that it's the solution to the obesity crisis, ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross said.

As Dr. Whelan stated in her New York Post op-ed

The city has initiated a war against fast-food restaurants -- a war that has nothing much to do with the advancement of public health.

January 24, 2008: Tuna, Vaccines, Diabetes, Truffles, and Vytorin

- Quote to Note: Every piece of that tuna, glistening on its bed of rice, is a report on the worrisome state of the oceans. --from today's New York Times editorial Tuna Troubles.

- The going green revolution started with cars that use less gasoline and lights that use less energy, but the newest leg of this movement is a bit of a stretch for us -- green cleaning products, cleaners that cost more money and many of which are shown to not clean as well. Dr. Whelan received a letter from her condominium board in which management announced with glee that the building is going green with its cleaning supplies. These green cleaners are non-detergent.

The whole thing is such a hoax, Dr. Whelan said, exasperated. It's a great business for these companies, to scare people and sell them a different product, but many of these green products are ineffective and lead to mold and mildew buildup, which can trigger allergies in sensitive people.

ACSH staffers noted that when people speak out against a green product they are labeled conspirators with big business. The funny thing is, big businesses like Clorox are the ones promoting green products.

- ACSH is a long-time advocate of vaccinating

But a recent story about adult vaccinations caught our attention -- and we realized we might need to shift our focus a bit. Adults are failing to get vaccines that would protect them from tetanus, whooping cough, influenza, and shingles. There now exists a vaccination against herpes zoster

(shingles), a terribly painful disease

Dr. Whelan recounted the time many years ago when former president Richard Nixon had shingles and she wrote him a letter, wishing him a speedy recovery. She received a response, in which Nixon wrote that shingles is not a disease you die from but a disease you wish you died from. We can only hope more adults take advantage of the new technology that provides protection from this disease.

- Yesterday the New York Times wrote about how losing weight and keeping it off is a great way of treating diabetes. The evidence suggested that treatments like stomach-shrinking surgery are the best remedy

Today, the Times wrote an editorial about this issue, and we couldn't agree with it more. Surgery may work best, but it's very expensive (the cost of bariatric surgery ranges from \$17,000 to \$70,000 or more, with the average cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000). Of course, in economic terms the surgery might delay or substantially reduce the rather high cost of long-term care for diabetic patients, but surgery as a solution for diabetes seems to be very impractical. Also, many people who are extremely overweight are at a higher risk of death from surgery. Before recommending that obese people undergo surgery, we'd need to see more data on the immediate and long-term benefits to health.

- The over-hyped story on mercury levels in tuna spread today from New York across the country. The New York Sun reported on how the Center for Consumer Freedom called for a retraction of the story, as we reported yesterday in the Dispatch, and the Sun even quoted ACSH's Jeff Stier saying that, as reported, the mercury levels

Instead of retracting the article, as Center for Consumer Freedom called for, the Times published an editorial that makes matters even worse, calling for a cleanup of the ocean in order to prevent future high levels of mercury in the fish we eat. There might be reasons to call for a cleanup of the oceans, but this is not one of them.

- On a lighter note, Valentine's Day is just around the corner, and advertisers are in full force. ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan received a Valentine's Day catalogue from the food vendor Harry and David last weekend. The catalogue featured milk and dark chocolate truffles, both of which were advertised as delivering five times more antioxidants than fresh blueberries. As Stier joked, in light of this discovery, maybe we should give up blueberry-picking in favor of chocolate-picking. Yum -- unfortunately, the benefits of antioxidants remain unclear.

- Finally, in the aftermath of the Vytorin study, the American Heart Association released a statement encouraging patients to consult with their doctors before they abruptly stop taking Vytorin. It's a reasonable and responsible statement, right? Not according to organizations like Public Citizen's Health Research Group, who took the opportunity to criticize AHA

Schering-Plough. Much the same way ACSH comes under attack based on funding issues, the AHA is now forced to defend itself, and its advice. AHA did not create its stance on the issue because it has in the past received funding from Schering-Plough -- its advice to consult physicians before stopping treatment is basic advice with which almost all doctors would agree.

January 25, 2008: Pregnancy, Meningitis, and Chemophobia

- Quote to Note: When you are sixty, it matters whether you took it for five years or ten years in your twenties. --Valerie Beral of the University of Oxford on the research she and her colleagues completed about how taking birth control pills lowers a woman's risk for ovarian cancer.

- This morning, we learned the sad news that a Long Island teenager died from meningitis. He was asymptomatic until merely hours before his death. It acts as a sober reminder that contagious and deadly diseases such as this are still out there, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan noted. While this is only one patient, not an epidemic, it's still scary. ACSH does not want to be alarmist, but as ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava said, "If I had a child who went to school with the boy who died from meningitis and knew him, I would take my child in to be tested.

CMV).

CMV is an oft-overlooked virus that is passed from an infected mother to her fetus and is the leading infectious cause of birth defects and developmental disabilities in the United States (the CMV infection occurs in one in 150 babies).

Simple steps can help prevent the disease's spread, Dr. Whelan pointed out, and it's important for pregnant women to know about these preventative measures. Since the leading transmitter of CMV in pregnant women is contact with the saliva or urine of preschool-age children, the CDC (and ACSH)

recommends the women wash their hands after any direct contact with young children.

- Fear of chemicals is rampant in the United States, and in a California-like move Hawaii is jumping on the anxiety bandwagon and trying to ban aspartame, the artificial sweetener

It's truly symbolic of the insanity going on about chemicals, Dr. Whelan said. There are so many people convinced -- for no reason -- that aspartame is killing them.

We wonder: If the ban passes, what will Hawaiians point to as the cause of future diseases without aspartame to blame? More seriously, if this becomes a law, what will the makers of those hundreds of aspartame-containing products do? It's doubtful companies are going to build separate 100%-safe aspartame-free products. More likely, Hawaiians will have to do without their diet sodas, among other things.

- ACSH staffers have been approached numerous times in the past few days about the tuna sushi scare. In response, Dr. Whelan and ACSH have released the following statement:

There are no legitimate health concerns associated with eating the tuna available today -- in sushi or other forms. Enjoy it without worry.

The front-page story by Marian Burros in the New York Times on Wednesday, January 23rd lacked critical perspective. She confused a legal/regulatory issue with a health issue.

The government sets standards on acceptable levels of mercury in fish. In calculating these levels, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is very conservative. The Agency set levels that are some 10-100 times lower than the level that could potentially cause harm. Even the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not currently express any concern about the safety of tuna. It is those highly-conservative EPA standards that Burros quotes when she claims that the fish is contaminated.

The levels now being found in tuna are well below levels that have ever been suspected of causing harm. Thus, while there may be a legal/regulatory issue here, with the fish violating the government's conservative tolerance level for mercury, that does not mean that a health hazard exists.

- On a lighter note, while it's been only bad news for tuna, there is some good news for fish lovers -- ocean-farmed salmon may provide a fountain of youth, preventing wrinkles, they're now saying. We're skeptical, but it's a nice thought!

- Also providing us with some much-needed positive news is a new study published in the most recent Lancet, showing that birth control pills lower risk of ovarian cancer -- even years after

While we have seen this result before, we don't believe we've ever seen a study of this magnitude. ACSH sometimes is wary of studies due to small test group size and association instead of causation issues, but this one substantiates the earlier work.

- An article in today's Wall Street Journal notes that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, as it works to alleviate hunger and poverty around the globe, hopes to avoid excessive use of pesticides, which the foundation sees as a drawback of the Green Revolution. Yesterday, though, the Journal's front-page article about Gates's evolving ideas on philanthropy noted that the Green Revolution's architect, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Dr. Norman Borlaug (an ACSH Trustee) was one of Gates's inspirations -- with or without pesticides. We're inclined to think that (the largely hypothetical) harms from pesticides would be a small price to pay to save a billion people from starvation.

January 28, 2008: Satellite Falling, Breasts Rising

- Quote to Note: We're trying to offer a caution that a portion of what has been called normal aging might in fact be due to ubiquitous environmental exposures like lead. --Dr. Brian Schwartz of Johns Hopkins University.

- Over the weekend, we read news of the FDA rejecting Merck's request to make the company's cholesterol-lowering statin Mevacor over-the-counter. ACSH staffers disagreed whether or not this is bad news. You first have to weigh the difference between health risks and pharma-economics, ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross explained. There are obvious health benefits of taking statins. Economically, though, if a drug is prescription only then it's usually covered by insurance. Over-the-counter drugs rarely are covered by insurance.

But there are also other issues to consider -- such as how an over-the-counter label would affect drug consumption. If statins were to be OTC, would everyone be taking statins? And is that really such a bad scenario, given the long-term benefits on heart disease?

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan said she believes the benefits of statins should outweigh any qualms, and she is disappointed the FDA rejected the OTC label. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava, though, expressed uncertainty. I'm very leery of people diagnosing and treating themselves, Dr. Kava noted.

- The latest lead-related scare is that accumulated levels of lead are the reason for slowed-down brains in the elderly. ACSH staffers took issue with some of the writer's conclusions but in general agreed that we can't dismiss the theory. It's a possibility, Dr. Kava said.

Still, Dr. Ross pointed out how the author hyperbolizes the risk -- he suggests that low levels of lead exposure can cause decreased brain capacity, but the people studied

ACSH may be quick to point out unsubstantiated risk (like low levels of mercury in tuna), but we're also quick to note real risks. Parents who have little children and also small pet turtles, get rid of your turtles! It's not worth the risk of salmonella.

- A satellite is expected to crash to earth after losing power, reported the U.S. government Sunday. Some news outlets focused on the hazardous chemicals that may fall down with debris, but ACSH staffers believe this is a prime example of ignoring

Los Angeles Times, in which he urges parents, and the paper's writers, to focus on how improved nutrition and obesity affects the documented premature puberty in young women -- instead of blaming trace chemicals in the environment.

January 29, 2008: Skateboards, Cigarettes, TV, and Cholesterol

- Quote to Note: A television show that perpetuates the myth that vaccines cause autism is the height of reckless irresponsibility on the part of ABC and its parent company, the Walt Disney Co. --Dr. Renee R. Jenkins, president of the influential American Academy of Pediatrics.

- Reading the headlines on today's newspapers, we hoped we were still asleep and having a nightmare. But the nightmare is reality.

The front page story in the Wall Street Journal about Philip Morris

Philip Morris Readies Plan to Kill Hundreds of Millions Worldwide. The company's planned spin-off as a stateless international behemoth, henceforth free of U.S. regulation and laws, appalled us. With an international division, it's targeting countries like China and India to market to more smokers -- and younger ones, too. The WSJ article also introduced us to new Philip Morris products, like the Marlboro Intense cigarette. The name exudes coolness and gives smokers the same nicotine jolt as regular cigarettes but in fewer puffs -- about six or seven.

Products such as this one reflect the slyness of the cigarette company. Philip Morris realizes many countries have (or will soon have) smoke-free rules on indoor smoking -- so these short cigarettes allow consumers to finish a cigarette in a short (five- to ten-minute) break outside.

The article implies that there's no opposition to Altria's plan (Altria is the parent company of Philip Morris) to bring high-tar smokes to Asia as an international organization free from U.S. regulations. Do people realize the deaths and sickness from this? ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan asked. Someone such as Nobel Prize-winner Dr. Norman Borlaug, an ACSH Trustee and father of the Green Revolution, is doing his best to feed the world

But then there's Philip Morris, trying to kill people in Third World countries with the effective weapon of cigarettes.

Here at ACSH we can rant, be outraged, and speak out as much as we can. But not even our shouts will bring down this huge international beast. What we need is for groups with moral compasses to speak up, Dr. Whelan noted. I believe religions should do this. What about the Roman Catholic Church? It's always speaking out against abortion and euthanasia, but it won't speak against a cigarette company killing millions with its products?

In addition to the Catholic Church or other religious organizations issuing a statement, we're curious whether any presidential hopeful will have the courage to take a stand on this issue.

- Just when we thought we'd grappled with our nightmare, we opened the New York Times and saw another scary headline: Statins may not lengthen life

Upon closer read, though, ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross pointed out that the statements are vague. For instance, responding to the question Do statins prolong your life? the Times writes, for many users, the surprising answer appears to be no.

That's like saying for many smokers, cigarettes do not cause lung cancer, Dr. Ross noted. High-risk groups taking statins have a lot to gain, including longevity. But while low-risk groups may not have a lot to gain, that doesn't mean that statins aren't on balance beneficial, or even a little bit helpful to some who aren't at highest risk.

- Thankfully, we also noted some positive news. Today, we are awarding the Honorary Seat at the ACSH Table to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). AAP had the courage to stand up against ABC and its parent company, Walt Disney, over the first episode of its new series, Eli Stone. The show, which is scheduled to air on Thursday, sensationalizes the claim that vaccines cause autism, with Eli Stone, a lawyer, winning a case based on this claim

If parents watch this program and choose to deny their children immunizations, ABC will share in the responsibility for the suffering and deaths that occur as a result, said Dr. Renee R. Jenkins, president of AAP.

Oftentimes, scientists choose to stay mute instead of speaking out, but the scientists at AAP refused to stay silent. We agree with Dr. Jenkins -- some viewers watching this show are going to fall for the thoroughly discredited theory that vaccines cause autism. If the show's creators wanted to depict corporate evasion, why choose this? They could have shown plenty of other instances, real and imagined, of corporate malfeasance, without themselves putting children's lives in danger.

ACSH, for one, will not be watching this episode of Eli Stone. We hope others will skip it as well.

- Injuries are a rite of passage in childhood -- from falling off the monkey bars to scraping a knee when playing kickball, everyone can remember a fair share of black-and-blue marks. The Wall Street Journal today, though, pointed out an added danger of head trauma: future loss of brain capacity, manifested by reduced concentration and memory

That's among the reasons major athletic organizations, including the NFL, have instituted new safeguards protecting athletes from repetitive head injury by restricting their participation after serious blows to the head.

A dangerous activity that instantly came to ACSH staffers' minds was skateboarding. Dr. Whelan said she always sees young pre-teens doing tricks on skateboards in New York -- a scary thought as they're rarely wearing any protective headgear. It may seem obvious, but the best way to protect children from head injuries from bicycle, scooter, and skateboard accidents is by making sure they wear helmets -- and buckle up every time they're in the car.

January 30, 2008: CA vs. Medical Tubing and Corn Syrup; NCI vs. Cancer Frankness

- Quote to Note: We don't think that a municipal health agency has any business banning a product the Food and Drug Administration has already approved. --Dan Fleshler, a spokesman for the National Restaurant Association, about California's effort to ban high-fructose corn syrup.

- If we followed all the instructions California activists gave us, we'd be using glass tubing at hospitals, playing without toys imported from China, and now doing without most sodas and desserts. In San Francisco, deadly high-fructose corn syrup may soon be banned, declared a headline in The Cutting Edge.

This week also saw Oklahoma Sen. Coburn give a speech at the Manhattan Institute denouncing high-fructose corn syrup and blaming the sweetener for an increase in diabetes. Sen. Coburn is right on one thing -- diabetes cases in the United States are on the rise, and not just in adults

ACSH staffers are very concerned about). But you cannot blame high-fructose corn syrup.

Even if we switch back to sugar, there will be no change in the number of diabetes cases, ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava explained. But we have no doubt California will go forward with this ban. It is reminiscent of New York City's trans fat ban -- people who stop eating trans fats are still eating equally unhealthy

Best-selling author John Grisham is at it again, out with a new sure-to-be hit. Unfortunately, his new book about a chemical company guilty of causing the biggest cancer cluster ever is based on a bogus premise -- that a lot of cancer cases are caused by environmental toxins leached by evil chemical companies. We see that Grisham has returned to fiction writing, but fiction often (not always) mirrors what's going on in real life and can reinforce the prevailing popular opinion. We hope people will read his latest thriller for entertainment value only and not assume that its underlying premises are true.

- The growing popular opinion is that acrylamide is a human carcinogen. Acrylamide is a naturally-occurring chemical that is formed when foods containing carbohydrates such as starch are cooked at high temperatures, as in frying or baking

Activists, of course, would argue with our definition, saying there's nothing natural about cooking food, thus there's nothing natural about acrylamide. Because some high-concentration rodent studies found an increased cancer risk as a result of acrylamide consumption, the controversy continues on whether or not acrylamide is safe.

So yesterday, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan went to the ultimate source on cancer -- the National Cancer Institute. The NCI does address acrylamide concerns in its frequently asked questions section. But instead of NCI scientists and cancer experts answering the question Is acrylamide safe? the NCI webpage just quoted the EPA's assertion that acrylamide is reasonably anticipated to be a human carcinogen.

It's ridiculous, Dr. Whelan said in disbelief. The EPA has no cancer specialists, and the NCI is quoting its opinion on what causes cancer? Why can't the nation's primary source of cancer expertise weigh in on this simple question: Should Americans be concerned about dietary acrylamide as a cause of human cancer? We already know the answer, but the NCI persists in ducking this discussion, as they have been doing on all chemical scares.

January 31, 2008: ABC's Autism Nonsense, Healing via the Heels, Anti-Antioxidants

- Quote to Note: It's clear that celebrities, both as outspoken public figures and on TV shows, have a funny way of getting us to believe them -- despite their absolute lack of expertise. Indeed, their actual expertise, like the expertise of the Eli Stone producers, lies in getting us to believe their fiction.

--ACSH's Jeff Stier in his New York Post

The researchers analyzed more than a dozen studies that included more than 100,000 patients. For each antioxidant, they found different results. For instance, selenium supplements reduced cancer risk by 23% among men but had no effect on women. But vitamin E had no anti-cancer effect overall -- although it did seem to reduce prostate cancer risk. And beta-carotene supplementation was associated with a greater risk of dying from cancer for smokers.

Everyone talks about cancer-fighting antioxidants, but this should be a lesson for everyone, ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan pointed out. You can't make those statements until research comes out.

- Without precious antioxidants to keep us healthy, what are Americans to do? Well, one Japanese company wants you to believe it has the answer -- Kinoki Foot Pads

These foot pads claim to detox your body while you sleep -- by morning, the pad will supposedly have absorbed toxins accumulated in your body, turning the originally white pad to a darker shade of gray or black (depending on just how toxic your body is, obviously). What a perfect quick fix for consumers! Americans are inundated with news of how toxic our bodies are on a daily basis -- this provides an ideal (but bogus) fix. As Dr. Whelan joked, it's a perfect Valentine's gift for someone you love and want to be toxin-free. At least it's a less invasive method than that other favorite de-toxer, colon cleansing!

We hope most Americans aren't this gullible and don't waste their money on such a useless product.

- Tonight marks the premiere of ABC's new drama, Eli Stone. As we mentioned earlier this week, the show's first episode is spreading the myth that vaccines cause autism. In a New York Post op-ed

ACSH's Jeff Stier urges celebrities and television programs to take more responsibility when utilizing supposedly health- and science-based story lines -- parents might refuse to vaccinate their children if they believe this fiction.

ACSH's Dr. Gil Ros

About the Author

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