

## Column 20

### UK HPA REPORT ON CELL PHONES & HEALTH IS NOT WHAT IT CLAIMS TO BE

*by Prof. Dariusz Leszczynski*

**Disclaimer:** *the opinions presented in this column are author's own and should NOT be considered as the official opinions of any of Dariusz Leszczynski's employers.*

**HELSINKI, Finland, May 3, 2012**--In the last two weeks, I participated in two scientific events. The first one was the EU COST Action BM0704 meeting in Lisbon, Portugal. The second was the Childhood Cancer 2012 conference in London, UK, organized by the charity Children with Cancer.

In both meetings, among other issues, the health risks of human exposure to cell phone radiation were debated. Research stagnation was evident.

Meetings in Lisbon and London were interesting events for me because they were the first scientific meetings that I attended after the May 2011 IARC meeting in Lyon and begun to write my science column for The Communities @ WashingtonTimes.com in December 2011.

It felt gratifying when many scientists, colleagues and friends, came to chat and let me know that they read my column, enjoy it and consider it an important for the open debate on cell phones and health. Of course, not everyone agrees with everything what I say but this is the spirit of the open and unbiased debate.

What is disappointing is that many scientists read the column but they hesitate to participate in the public discussion by submitting comments. In order for the debate to be lively and science based comments from scientists are much needed, even when submitted anonymously.

I think that commenting on science blogs or news media science columns is considered by many as "beyond the dignity of the real scientist." In the opinion of many, not only scientists, the real scientific debate is and should be conducted solely in the peer-reviewed scientific journals. For some, reading science blogs or columns might be as if admitting to read "gossip news."

I disagree. Work of a scientist should not be limited to executing research projects and publishing results in scientific journals. Scientist should also explain to the general public what the meaning of the obtained research results is. This job cannot be left for the journalists alone, as it so often seems to happen now.

Scientists should engage in dialogue with the general public in news media, including the internet. Otherwise, the general public is at the mercy of journalists, who in fact are part of the general public and the vast majority of them do not understand science enough. Consequently, reporting on scientific research in news media is often of poor quality and causes more confusion than it clarifies issues for the general public.

By some kind of coincidence (or not?), during the Childhood Cancer 2012 conference, the UK Health Protection Agency's AGNIR group has released its latest report on cell phone radiation and health. The report was released with lots of media attention, especially in UK (in Finland it was no news).

The report is a long story to read, totaling some 333 pages. It is a lot of stuff to read. For those impatient there is an executive summary.

Reading it feels surreal. Like the authors would either not understand the studies they read or had pre-written conclusions? It is like reading a wish list written by someone claiming that there is not and will never be any problems related to cell phone exposures.

On the contrary to the claims of HPA's AGNIR Report:

- Epidemiology is of insufficient quality to provide even remotely reliable evidence.
- Animal studies showing no effects are useless because the results do not prove that humans will not react to cell phone exposures
- Human volunteer studies where volunteers are asked how they feel do not provide objective information and are thus unreliable to make far reaching health claims.
- Many of the in vitro studies show the same effects, even if they are not exact replications. The continuation to claim the lack of established effects of cell phone radiation is wrong.

All of the above issues, claimed by AGNIR Report to be in order, are not. All of them were reviewed in this science column earlier. This is the disagreement on science and on the interpretation of the results. It is good for the debate.

However, there is something very wrong with the AGNIR Report otherwise. Not only what is in the report is debatable, but what is not seems even more interesting.

The AGNIR Report puts lots of effort into evaluation of the research on potential causal link between cell phone radiation and cancer. However, the 2011 IARC classification of cell phone radiation as a possible carcinogen is not mentioned at all in this report. It is simply as if IARC's evaluation would not take place.

It is obvious that the AGNIR's members do not agree with the outcome of IARC evaluation. However, complete omission of it feels like rewriting of history and omitting inconvenient facts. In my opinion it shows a very biased attitude of AGNIR members towards the IARC classification.

After all, in the cancer research the IARC evaluations are a "gold standard".

IARC classification is not only what is missing from the report. The report claims to be the most comprehensive to-date review of all studies published after 2003 (year of the first AGNIR Report).

During the years 2004 – 2010 my research group at STUK published/co-authored 7 original studies on stress response, protein expression and gene expression executed both in cells grown in laboratory and in human volunteers. Studies are well known and were published in such well known journals as PROTEOMICS or BMC Genomics. [Anyone can find them](#) on PubMed.

None of these seven separate studies from my research group is mentioned in the HPA AGNIR Report.

Forgotten? I can understand that one or two studies can be mistakenly forgotten when handling hundreds of studies. But seven studies? This does not sound right. It is an intentional omission to skew review and to mislead readers. No other explanation is plausible.

Curious, I looked for some studies by other scientists that were published after 2003. To my dismay many were missing. I strongly advise readers of the report to check the references. There might be unexpected surprises.

One seems to be clear, unlike the [claims on HPA website](#) the **UK HPA AGNIR Report 2012 is not a comprehensive** review but it is a **biased** review