

Environmentalists Win With New IARC Director Elisabete Weiderpass



By Hank Campbell — May 17, 2018



With the term of controversial International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) Director Christopher Wild thankfully at an end, speculation about the new head of the embattled UN agency was rampant, probably for the first time in its history.

The reason there was so much concern is simple: They have lost their way. They no longer do science, they do activism and call it epidemiology. The inmates in epidemiology, from Martyn Smith to Chris Portier, have been running the asylum, they have exploited IARC's bizarre 'five orders of magnitude for dose determines hazard' to get pet causes for trial lawyers a veil of legitimacy, and the public and government agencies no longer trust it. Before making any decisions on its funding future, U.S. policymakers wanted to know if IARC was truly serious about reform or if they would continue with the activist status quo that have declared bacon and toast as dangerous as plutonium and cigarettes.

We now have the answer. [The status quo has won](#) [1], which means we may be facing 10 more years of ideological winter masquerading as evidence.

Last month, I handicapped the top 8 choices and [I concluded there two ways this could go](#) [2]: Dr. Elisabete Weiderpass, an IARC insider so inside she is even married to a member of the Old Guard, Harri Vainio; or Dr. Shuji Ogino, an Asian pathologist in the U.S. I noted that Weiderpass had an advantage in that she is a reliable choice for a group that does not want to shake things up too much. But she is a woman, so Europeans can pretend they are being progressive. Ogino is not European, which would also be progressive but I noted "He is Asian and Europeans may want to diversify but not that much. They may prefer a European woman over an Asian man."

And I finished, "Either the first vote will come down along predictable lines but then they will want

to reach a consensus and Ogino will get the nod. Or the Old Guard will win and their safe choice, Weiderpass, will sail through without any resistance at all. It's IARC, which means it is more politics than science."

Defenders of IARC in the environmental community will pretend that kind of cultural litmus test had nothing to do with it, at least for public consumption, but since they have politically manipulated the organization into adopting their agenda, they know they are just playing to the crowd.

It's not like Dr. Weiderpass is unqualified, I instead noted she had excellent credentials with an MD and a PhD, but IARC faces an existential crisis. The only people pretending to care what IARC says are trial lawyers in California. Only an outsider can fix that. Instead, member countries took the safe route, someone married to an IARC insider of 30 years, but not someone obviously symbolic of the malaise there, like Joachim Schüz.

The challenge for Weiderpass is to avoid 'catching a falling knife' - to watch helplessly as governments abandon IARC. The agency needs to get back to doing the kind of rigorous work they did when Dr. John Higginson first ran it. Higginson was on our Board so it has been painful to watch such a great hazard assessment agency fall into disrepair, chasing media attention. Repairing their reputation means shucking off the influence of our own National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), which under the guidance of Dr. Linda Birnbaum has embraced correlation scaremongering and telling toxicologists and biologists to go find a mechanism after her statisticians declare things harmful. That is where IARC got Portier, it is where they got Martyn Smith.

That isn't science, it isn't evidence-based thinking. And IARC needs to be a legitimate force for the public good once again, or be gone.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/05/17/environmentalists-win-new-iarc-director-elisabete-weiderpass-12975>

Links

[1] http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/pr/2018/pdfs/pr260_E.pdf

[2] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2018/04/13/who-will-lead-iarc-here-are-most-likely-choices-and-my-prediction-12833>