ACSH Dispatches Round-Up: Spring Brings Thoughts Unscientific

By ACSH Staff — May 27, 2008

DISPATCH: Plastic, Longevity, Gender, and Vitamins

The Anti-Quote of the Day: The dangers of plastic bottles
"The truthful answer is that nobody knows" their full health impact yet, said David Ozonoff, a professor of environmental health at the Boston University School of Public Health. "And because we don't know, it's prudent to avoid something that is avoidable." -__Boston Globe__, April 23, 2008.

ACSH on Fox News

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan appeared on Fox News yesterday to discuss a new study about life expectancy in America. She emphasized that the study's primary conclusion was very good news: Overall, Americans are living longer than ever--with a seven-year increase in life expectancy between 1960 and the 1990s. But there are segments of the population in which life expectancy is actually declining. And what is that due to? Three risk factors explain most of this bad news: cigarette smoking, high blood pressure, and obesity. Smoking not only causes deaths from lung cancer but also chronic lung diseases, heart disease, and more. Obesity, which is on the rise, adversely affects almost every system in the body--and contributes to about 100,000 premature deaths per year. Hypertension (high blood pressure) causes heart attacks, heart failure, and strokes. Addressing overall increase in lifespan--and the fact that we know that lifestyle factors contribute to premature disease and death--Dr. Whelan commented on-air that it was bizarre, given this news, that Americans spend so much time worrying about hypothetical risks, like purported hazards of plastic bottles, which play no role whatsoever in the causation of disease.

Eating breakfast may determine your sex. Really?

Women who consumed low-calorie diets or skipped breakfast at the time of conception are more likely to give birth to girls than boys( http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080422/hl_nm/gender_diet_dc [1] ). We guess researchers must be running out of "real things" to study, at least that is the only logical conclusion we could come up with for this new study. The research conducted by the usually-respectable universities of Exeter and Oxford purportedly provides evidence that a child's sex is associated with the mother's diet, and higher energy intake is linked to male offspring. ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross said, "this is a case where you stick a bunch of numbers into a machine and see what comes out." Gender is genetically determined by the fathers, and yet the authors claim that it is known that high levels of glucose encourage the growth and development of male embryos while inhibiting female ones. The last time I checked, we aren't amphibians, and we don't change sex in response to our environment, let alone glucose levels.

Bottle confusion

Yesterday, CVS said it will join Wal-Mart, bottle-maker Nalgene, and other companies in pulling
tens of thousands of shatter-proof, transparent products off store shelves. The cause of this massive panic? Bisphenol-A (BPA), the chemical most commonly used in some plastic products. The range of products containing BPA includes the lining of most canned goods, baby bottles, water bottles, sunglasses, etc. and has been used for decades. So why are we so concerned all of a sudden? The answer is that a few high-dose rodent studies have linked exposure to small amounts of bisphenol-A with reproductive problems and possible cancers later in life([2]). But the media and parents seem to lose focus when it comes to health and forget that chemicals that harm animals at high doses are not always bad for humans, particularly in the tiny amounts to which most people are exposed.

Last Friday, Health Canada jumped on the anti-BPA bandwagon, too, announcing that the compound was potentially harmful to people, especially newborns and infants. If no new scientific evidence is brought forward in the next sixty days, officials announced they would ban it from all baby bottles in the country.

At ACSH, we wonder what the economic price tag of all of this will be. Of course, there will be some companies who probably profit from all the hysteria via the new, fashionable marketing tool called "greenwashing"--hyping the alleged "environment-friendly and child-safe" nature of the chemical-free product. This is actually no benefit to health at all. An example of "greenwashing" is an e-mail that Dr. Whelan received from Nature’s Baby Organics. They wanted to let Dr. Whelan know about their new shampoo/body wash that is not just for babies but the whole family. The best part about the shampoo is that it’s phthalate, sulfate, and paraben-free! Hmmm, we wonder how much that bottle of shampoo costs -- and if it even works?

All of these reactions from companies such as CVS and Wal-Mart are based on the precautionary principle([3]), not hard data showing danger from bisphenol-A or indeed from any of these compounds.

Toxic vitamins
You may want to think twice before taking vitamin and mineral supplements. There have been 180 reports of illness in people who took dietary supplements containing toxic levels of the mineral selenium([4]). The Food and Drug Administration found up to 200 times the label level of selenium in the products. The agency also found seventeen times the label level of chromium but has not yet concluded if those levels are toxic. Dr. James Lando, who is leading the investigation at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, found toxic levels of the minerals in about 1,200 bottles distributed in sixteen states and over the Internet. Fortunately, no deaths have been reported, although one person was hospitalized. The products are distributed by Total Body Essential Nutrition Inc.

A healthy balanced diet is usually your best bet at getting all your vitamins and minerals. You would have to eat a lot of most foods to reach toxic levels, and even then it would be very difficult. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava noted that, "Supplement purveyors don't have to show their products are safe before they're marketed--it's a case of let the buyer beware!" However, there are some people--older women especially--that need supplemental calcium and vitamin D to protect against thinning bones, and women of child-bearing age might need folate supplements since they can't get enough in their diets. Supplements can be very helpful for some people, as long as the label
level reflects what is really in the pill.

DISPATCH: Plastics, Calories, Cereals, Watermelons, and Onstage Scares

Quote of the Day
"If large doses don't harm, how can small ones do so? It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that makes no sense, just someone acquainted with the basic principle of toxicology that the dose makes the poison." --Dr. Gil Ross, _Washington Times_ op-ed (see below).

Plastic Hysteria: ACSH Op-Ed
ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross wrote an op-ed( http://washingtontimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080424/COMMENTAR... [5] ) in the _Washington Times_ today about the current plastic hysteria. Dr. Ross noted, "A new health scare -- over the safe and useful plastic component, bisphenol-A (BPA) -- has taken wing, fomented by the usual suspects: 'experts' in rat toxicology working with alarmist, chemical-hating 'environmental' activists and self-serving media scaremongers." Dr. Ross goes on to say, "There is no evidence at all -- none -- that human beings of any age or developmental stage have been harmed in any way by common exposure to BPA. Even workers using the chemical in manufacturing have not been shown to have suffered any harm."

Dr. Ross predicted in his op-ed that plaintiffs' lawyers would be flocking to "protect" the public from the non-existent (but lucrative) threats lurking in our plastic bottles. Already a California mother of two filed a lawsuit, claiming she bought the company's reusable beverage containers for herself and her two daughters, now ages eleven and thirteen, for several years, Reuters reports. The suit charges that Nalgene continued using the chemical in its containers long after studies linked it to health risks, but the suit doesn't mention any ailments suffered by the plaintiff( http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,352431,00.html [6] ).

As ACSH often stresses, even if rodents suffer at high doses of a chemical, to quote Dr. Ross, "it has nothing to do with human health: The same animal tests performed on natural chemicals we eat and drink every day give the same 'toxicity' results. If we consistently banned substances based on these tests, we'd be left with nothing at all, natural or manmade."

Calorie Posting: A Chance to Study Obesity
A good post by Stephen Dubner appeared on Freakonomics yesterday( http://freakonomics.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/04/23/a-great-opportunity-for... [7] ) about the new calorie posting on menu boards required in New York. Dubner said, "It struck me that this new regulation presents a great opportunity for obesity researchers. If you could get good data, I'm guessing we could learn a lot about how a posted calorie count affects eating behavior." He goes on to list things we could test for such as: How calorie-sensitive are people in general? Are they more so during different times of day, days of the week, or types of days (holiday vs. workday, bad weather vs. good, etc.)? If a posted calorie count does shock people into buying/eating differently, how long does that shock last?

Dubner poses a question that we think everyone in public health is also asking: Will calorie signs affect demand for lower-calorie foods?
Children's Cereals Unhealthy?
A study conducted at Yale University compares the nutrient profiles of cereals marketed to kids with those of "adult" cereals and finds that most (66%) of kids' cereals failed to meet national nutrition standards, especially re: sugar content. But fiber and protein were also lower than in adult cereals, while calories were not. "The cereal the parent is eating him or herself is probably better than what they're feeding their child," stated Dr. Marlene B. Schwartz of Yale University, the lead researcher on the study(http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080423/hl_nm/cereals_healthy_dc;_ylt=ApyzQX... [8]).

The purpose of the study was to see if promotion of all cereals is equally justifiable based on their nutritional profiles. Clearly, the answer is "no," according to the study. They also report that nutrient content claims and/or health claims can create a "halo" effect so that consumers (primarily parents) think the product is more healthful than it is. Per serving, children's cereals were higher in energy from total fat, sodium, and carbohydrates and significantly lower in fiber and protein. The cereals meant for children had 52% more sugar per gram than other cereals.

On the basis of nutritional value, it's clear that "adult" cereals are a better choice than those marketed to children. Parents must look beyond product claims on packages to find the best nutritional value -- and let companies know if they find kids' cereals lacking. One problem is that children must want to eat the cereal, or it won't matter if the nutritional value is better. It's important to recognize, however, that even if a particular cereal is not the greatest nutritionally speaking, consuming it with milk will improve its profile, and it will still be better for the child than skipping breakfast.

Lessons of the Square Watermelon
We are growing closer every day to a worldwide food crisis, and we will need all the ingenuity we have to solve this problem. The ultimate irony is that we have biotechnology but are not using it as much as we could. Here is a little anecdote we would like to share with you(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1390088.stm [9]). Maybe it will inspire some hope that we can overcome the looming food shortages and start the next green revolution.

Japan had a problem with cost-effectively shipping watermelons but discovered that by growing them in cubical boxes, "square" watermelons could be created that were more easily shipped, stacked, and brought home after purchase. This is a great reminder (as ACSH friend Terry Balderson suggests) that in the search for efficient food solutions, we should avoid clinging to unnecessary assumptions, question old habits, be creative, look for better ways, and resist dismissing what seems like an "impossible" option out of hand. We salute the "square" watermelon.

ACSH's Todd Seavey Takes on Health Scares
Todd Seavey will be interviewed about "How to Debunk False Health Claims," live onstage at Chelsea Market (Ninth Avenue and 15th St. in NYC) on April 30 at 8:30pm, as part of their weekly Mind Games event, hosted by Jen Dziura. Drop by and see if the audience leaves even more skeptical than they entered, in a good way.
DISPATCH: Malaria, Risk, EPA, and Food

World Malaria Day: Not Time to Celebrate Yet

Well, today is World Malaria Day. To quote ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross, "It remains a tragedy, almost a crime, for this disease, which can largely be prevented by effective mosquito control, to continue to claim over 1 million lives each year -- mainly children under five. And the best mosquito control is still DDT, a chemical (although hated and feared by so-called 'environmentalists') that has saved more lives than any other, and whose discoverer won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1948."

Obsessing Over Small Risks

We were very disappointed when we read a Fox News business report( http://www.foxbusiness.com/markets/industries/health-care/article/need-h... [10] ) quoting Dr. Michael Thun, chief epidemiologist for the American Cancer Society, on the subject of the safety of plastic bottles (and the chemical BPA). He claimed that it was "perfectly reasonable" for people to try to reduce their exposure to BPA. Perfectly reasonable to reduce your exposure to something merely because high doses causes cancer in rodents? Has Dr. Thun seen ACSH's _Holiday Dinner Menu?_ ( http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.103/pub_detail.asp [11] ) Would he also argue that it is also "perfectly reasonable" to reduce our risk by avoiding mushrooms (hydrazines), nutmeg (safrole), and peanut butter (aflatoxins) because they contain animal carcinogens? The American Cancer Society should be helping Americans distinguish real risks from bogus ones -- yet they have instead chosen a politically correct route, urging the "precautionary principle" be followed, just in case.

And we were similarly disappointed -- but not surprised -- that the Center for Science in the Public Interest has weighed in on BPA too. David Schardt, senior nutritionist for CSPI, agrees that the research demands the public's attention and further investigation. "There's enough disturbing evidence from well-designed studies that you can't dismiss this as harmless," he said. "There may be something going on and it has to be pursued."

At least the executive director of the American Public Health Association had something sensible to say on the issue: "I so often see people very concerned about some things that have some risk, minimal risk, and they obsess on it," said Dr. Georges Benjamin, "then they drive without their seatbelt while they're smoking."

EPA Scientists Burdened by Political Pressure?

According to the activists at the Union of Concerned Scientists, more than half of the scientists at the Environmental Protection Agency who responded to a survey said they had experienced political interference in their work( http://www.latimes.com/news/custom/scimedemail/la-na-epa24apr24,0,361968... [12] ). The online questionnaire was sent to 5,419 EPA scientists last summer: 1,586 replied, and of those, 889 reported that they had experienced at least one type of interference within the last five years. Dr. Whelan said, "there is a complete lack of transparency here -- the people who are content or have nothing to say probably couldn't be bothered responding, so maybe you have a few disgruntled employees, that doesn't translate into mass political pressure when less then one-third of the EPA scientists even responded."

Francesca Grifo, director of the scientific integrity program for the Union of Concerned Scientists
did acknowledge that scientists who were frustrated or upset might have been more likely than those who were satisfied to respond to her organization's survey but added: "Nearly 900 EPA scientists reported political interference in their scientific work. That's 900 too many." At ACSH, we are still not convinced. And speaking of transparency -- or the lack thereof -- we noted that the Union of Concerned Scientists, an anti-industry advocacy group, was benignly describe by the Los Angeles Times as "a Washington-based non-profit group," leading the uninformed reader to believe that they are a neutral, unbiased source of information on science and political pressure -- which of course they are not.

Food Hoarding
Recently, places like Costco and Sam's Club have been limiting how many bags of rice, soybean oil, and flour you can purchase (sometimes only four per person). This was an attempt to stop food hoarding. Paul McNamara, a professor in the University of Illinois's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Economics, said the situation at Costco and Sam's was unusual because when supplies tighten, the most common response is to keep raising prices, not limit sales. He thinks it's a short-term situation most likely connected to a fear of a disruption in the companies' supply chain([http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-fri-food-limits-apr25,0,344981.story](http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/chi-fri-food-limits-apr25,0,344981.story)).

We are entering turbulent times, since people have not been this concerned about the food supply since World War II. All of this food anxiety may bode well for biotechnology, which could help keep the costs down for staple ingredients (flour, rice, corn, etc.) and keep supplies abundant.

DISPATCH: Chemophobes, Cereal Killers, and Diabetic Moms
Chem-Phobia -- and FDA Revisits BPA Data
An op-ed by Dr. Whelan([http://www.nypost.com/seven/04282008/postopinion/opedcolumnists/chem_pho...](http://www.nypost.com/seven/04282008/postopinion/opedcolumnists/chem_pho...)) appears in the New York Post today, and she confronts the headlines about plastic bottles and other products being linked to cancer risks, infertility, impaired sexual development, and more that have been scaring people for past few months. Dr. Whelan noted, "But the risks aren't real -- the scary 'news' is an artifact of a research method that falsely reports dangers in chemicals that don't harm our health." Self-appointed environmentalists are promoting this idea, and the real question is, Why are no scientists with expertise in human health speaking out in defense of these harmless chemicals? Dr. Whelan thinks that "Scientists largely remain mute while the risks are being hyped and science distorted. Reporters typically don't call experts who won't give the desired scare quote." The Food and Drug Administration and Consumer Product Safety Commission -- who are on the record as saying these products are safe -- have not stepped forward to calm the fears.
Speaking of our friends at FDA, they are now reconsidering the safety of BPA. FDA Commissioner Andrew von Eschenbach launched the review after the National Toxicology Program's April 15 report suggesting that BPA may alter human development. We are incredulous that the FDA is going to do a new review of the data, because we know the same conclusions will be reached: that BPA is harmless at the quantities humans are exposed too. This whole campaign that the FDA is about to embark upon is being done simply to appease politicians and activist groups([http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-04-27-bpa_N.htm][15]) (ACSH, by contrast, is concerned with science, not PR).

The favorite phrase of many perpetrating the chemical witch hunt is "better to be safe than sorry." But is it really? Dr. Whelan said, "when corporations end up abandoning perfectly safe products, because it's just not worth the money to fight the hysteria, the withdrawals and product reformulations are extremely costly, leading to higher prices but not an iota of improved safety. Each time it happens, another useful product of technology vanishes."

Cereal Killer Goes Airborne
A fascinating and worrisome op-ed([http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/26/opinion/26borlaug.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=N...][16]) by ACSH founding Trustee Dr. Norman Borlaug appeared in the _New York Times_ this weekend. Dr. Borlaug -- who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 as the "Father of the Green Revolution" -- talks about soaring food prices and food shortages, which threaten hunger and political chaos. He said, "the time could not be worse for an epidemic of stem rust in the world's wheat crops. Yet millions of wheat farmers, small and large, face this spreading and deadly crop infection." Dr. Whelan noted, "this is an example of how we take our food supply for granted."

Stem rust, the most feared of all wheat diseases, can turn a healthy crop of wheat into a tangled mass of stems that produce little or no grain. The fungus spores travel in the wind, causing the infection to spread quickly. It has caused major famines since the beginning of history. In North America, huge grain losses occurred in 1903 and 1905 and from 1950 to 1954. Dr Borlaug remains optimistic, though, and said, "The looming catastrophe can be avoided if the world's wheat scientists pull together to develop a new generation of stem-rust-resistant varieties of wheat. But scientists must quickly turn their attention to replacing almost all of the commercial wheat grown in the world today. This will require a commitment from many nations, especially the United States, which has lately neglected its role as a leader in agricultural science."

The stem rust strain Ug99 could reduce world wheat production by 60 million tons, which is unacceptable. With the demand for food increasing all the time, producing less food is a recipe for disaster.

Diabetes and Pregnancy
The number of women with diabetes giving birth more than doubled recently, reported a new study([http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-04-28-diabetes-pregnancy_N.htm][17]). Scientists at the Kaiser Permanente Department of Research & Evaluation studied 175,249 women and teens between 1999 and 2005. They discovered a rapid increase in the number of diabetic women giving birth during the seven-year period, from 245 women in 1999 to 537 in 2005.
The researchers suspect that most of that increase can be attributed to women or teenage girls who had gained weight and developed type 2 diabetes. "Women or teens who have just developed type 2 diabetes might get pregnant before they know they have the disease," says Sue Kirkman, a vice president for clinical affairs at the American Diabetes Association. Kirkman also notes that "Overweight women or women with a family history of diabetes should get their blood sugar levels checked before trying to get pregnant...Many women don't realize they are pregnant at first and don't get a chance to curb sugar levels early enough to prevent birth defects that occur in the first trimester."

ACSH's Dr. Ross noted a possible silver lining to this news: "Perhaps the increasing number of diabetic mothers giving birth could also be due to better diabetes drugs and care. Diabetic women may have a better chance of conceiving now, as well as carrying to term."

DISPATCH: Exercise, Reading, Research, and Supplements

Exercise: it does a body good
Do two sets of sit-ups, push-ups, and lunges with a glass of water and call me in the morning. Exercise can be prescribed for anything: from protection against hypertension and stroke to helping alleviate some symptoms of diseases such as Parkinson's and rheumatoid arthritis( http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/29/health/29brod.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&oref=...[18]). "The single thing that comes close to a magic bullet, in terms of its strong and universal benefits, is exercise," Frank Hu, epidemiologist at the Harvard School of Public Health, said in _Harvard_ Magazine.

Dr. Marilyn Moffat, a professor of physical therapy at New York University, said, "The data show that regular moderate exercise increases your ability to battle the effects of disease...It has a positive effect on both physical and mental wellbeing. The goal is to do as much physical activity as your body lets you do and rest when you need to rest."

Especially now, with the growing obesity epidemic, people really need to lace up their shoes or put on bathing suits and engage in some sort of physical activity. We might all be aware by now that aerobic exercise lowers blood pressure in people with hypertension, but moderate exercise can also cut the risk of developing diabetes. For those with diabetes, exercise improves glucose tolerance -- less medication is needed to control blood sugar -- and reduces the risk of life-threatening complications. "For people with arthritis, a program that builds gradually and protects inflamed joints can diminish pain, fatigue, morning stiffness, depression, and anxiety and improve strength, walking speed, and activity." Says Dr. Moffat

Exercising may seem daunting for healthy people and even more so for those who are chronically ill. But when exercise is done slowly with small, achievable goals, a sense of accomplishment, better sleep, less pain, and enhanced satisfaction with life can become reasons to pursue physical activity. No wonder diet or elixir can give you the same emotional and physical results.

Misleading headlines
The headlines of a _New York Times_ obituary and set of a _Wall Street Journal_ letters to the editor caught our eye today. Both conveyed the popular wisdom on their respective subjects -- but both were misinformed.
The headline for the obit(\footnote{http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/29/health/29stewart.html?_r=1&ref=obituar... [19]}) for former Surgeon General William H. Stewart stated that he "put the first warnings on cigarette packs." Actually, he did no such thing. The warning was slapped on packs in 1966 as a result of the landmark Surgeon General's Report of 1964. But it was Congress, under the guidance of the cigarette industry, that created the warning label and dictated its language, not the Surgeon General. Back then, the cigarette manufacturers were in a state of panic over the fact that individual states were contemplating mandating their own warning labels -- which obviously would result in interstate chaos for the manufacturers, who would have been forced to produce different labels for different states. For the industry, it would be far less threatening to put on a standard, national label.

But the real prize for the industry was, of course, the fact that a federal warning label would insulate them from lawsuits. For decades after the label was mandated, the industry argued, in essence, that "cigarettes are not dangerous, but if they were (which they are not), the government label pre-empts us from having to warn about the specific dangers of smoking." The so-called Surgeon General's Warning label was the industry's Teflon protection against lawsuits alleging that they did not disclose the risks of smoking.

The WSJ features a number of letters(\footnote{http://online.wsj.com/public/page/letters.html [20]} today about the alleged benefits of giving FDA regulatory authority over "tobacco." The headline reads "Tobacco, Most Lethal, Should be Regulated at Last."

The misrepresentation here -- which is reflected in the legislation itself -- is due to the fact that tobacco per se is not "lethal." Cigarettes are lethal. Indeed, prior to the commercial introduction of cigarettes at the turn of the last century, tobacco was used relatively safely. The headline, like the legislation itself, is based on the mistaken belief that all forms of tobacco pose the same hazards. (ACSH opposes this legislation for a variety of reasons -- including the fact that it blurs these differences in risks.)

Scientific research*

When research is really good, should it really matter who funds it? David A. Shaywitz and Dennis A. Ausiello wrote an excellent op-ed in the _Boston Globe_(\footnote{http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2008/0... [21]}) today, in which they said, "The notion that academic researchers who partner with industry are intrinsically tainted reflects a misunderstanding of the importance and quality of industry research and the role industry plays in bringing new drugs to the patients who need them." We have mentioned in a previous Morning Dispatch the _New York Times_ profile of three academic researchers from New England who have pledged to decline industry funding. The researchers claimed that the financial sacrifice is well worth it, since they will remove the dreaded asterisks next to their names that label them tainted with industry money.

The authors of the _Boston Globe_ piece noted, "While most of the original insights leading to new drugs and devices likely derive, at least in part, from the work of academic scientists, turning these preliminary advances into FDA-approved treatments required an exceptional investment by industry and vital partnerships between academic investigators and company scientists." Shaywitz
and Dr. Ausiello believe that "To overcome these hurdles, there is a need for more, not less, interaction between academic physician scientists and their counterparts in industry, engagement that should occur at every stage of the drug development process."

We think it is absurd that industry research is condemned so harshly. Research that is funded by industry, and that ultimately generates profound new scientific insights, is beneficial both to the sponsoring companies and to the rest of us, the public( http://www.acsh.org/news/newsID.1689/news_detail.asp [22] ). The long-standing partnership between scientific research and industry accounts, to a large degree, for our current enviable lifestyle and longevity.

"News" about anti-oxidants: same as before, no evidence of benefit
A study published April 16, 2008 in the _Cochrane Library_ once again demonstrates that supplements might not help you at all; they may actually harm you. A review of sixty-seven randomized trials of antioxidant supplements has found no evidence that they prolong life and strong evidence that they might shorten it( http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/29/health/research/29nost.html?partner=rs... [23] ). The trials included almost a quarter-million participants, including healthy people and those with various diseases. Many people are still unaware of the potential consequences taking supplements can have such as drug interactions or vitamin and mineral toxicity( http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.1135/news_detail.asp [24] )

The authors of the study state their conclusions firmly. "Beta carotene, vitamin A, and vitamin E...given singly or combined with other antioxidant supplements significantly increase mortality." We hope that people will start to pay attention to these results and not take supplements blindly.

DISPATCH: Breasts, Lungs, Menus, and Sin

Alcohol consumption linked to breast cancer, but folate may help
The news linking alcohol consumption to breast cancer keeps on coming. There appears to be no safe level of consumption. This week, Danish researchers reported more evidence linking alcohol consumption to greater risk of breast cancer in women( http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/fea/lifetravel/stories/DN-nh... [25] ). The researchers tracked nearly 10,000 women for twenty-seven years and found that alcohol consumed before menopause correlated best with breast cancer.

More alcohol equals more risk. "Some studies suggest that two or more drinks per day are associated with about a 30 to 40% increase in the risk of breast cancer," says Dr. JoAnn E. Manson, chief of preventive medicine at Harvard's Brigham and Women's Hospital. However, just one drink per day translates to "about a 10% increased risk of breast cancer," says Eric Rimm of the Harvard School of Public Health. ACSH has long noted that increased risks in the 10% to 30% range are relatively speaking very small -- but here can be statistically significant.

The mechanism behind alcohol and breast cancer is still not fully understood, but what is known is that alcohol boosts estrogen and other hormones, which may be linked to breast cancer. Interestingly, the B vitamin folate can significantly reduce the risk of developing breast cancer associated with alcohol. Researchers in a 1998 study looked at women who had at least one drink
of alcohol per day, and they found that breast cancer risk was greatest among those with the lowest folate intake. Since women in the childbearing years are already encouraged to take folate supplements and eat diets rich in folate -- to prevent neural tube defects in case of pregnancy -- this new finding is one more impetus to promote higher folate intake in women's diets.

Lung cancer in China soars
Jaw-dropping is the only way to describe the new findings of a national health survey( http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2008-04/29/content_8074947.htm ). Deaths due to lung cancer in China have risen by 465% in the past thirty years. ACSH's Dr. Ross noted, "As compared to most of the statistical associations we hear about, this sounds like a situation of cause and effect." An official with the ministry of health said, "In the past three decades, death rates of lung, liver, intestine, breast, and bladder cancers have jumped, and these cancers are closely linked to environment and lifestyle...The death rate of both urban and rural Chinese from cancers are higher than the world level."

Dr. Ross said, "liver cancer is usually the number one killer over other types of cancer in developing countries, which is likely due to infection with hepatitis b or c or a parasitic disease." Although it's possible some of the results could be attributed to better data collection, the high percentages speak volumes. It comes as no surprise to us that lung cancer has now surpassed liver cancer, since the Chinese are heavy smokers. It was really only a matter of time before we started to see this outcome.

FDA asked to put in its two cents
A federal appeals court let New York City proceed with ordering some chain restaurants to post calorie counts on menu boards as it decides whether the rule is legal( http://www.1010wins.com/Appeals-Court-Seeks-FDA-Guidance-for-N-Y--Menus/... ). However, the Second U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals left room to rule against the city in the future by seeking the Food and Drug Administration's opinion on whether FDA rules let cities dictate what restaurants must tell customers.

We at ACSH ask: what does the FDA have anything to do with this? Plus, are they really qualified to give an answer? Do they have any studies showing that calorie posting will in fact help reduce obesity? The only study done on it is questionable, as you may recall from a previous Morning Dispatch: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) criticized and rejected the study, which focused on the Subway restaurant chain. We also wonder by what legal authority the judge can demand that the FDA issue an opinion "within thirty days." Do government agencies ever meet a request within thirty days?

Repent, sinners! Or pay the Fat-Tax!
Apparently eating a burger and fries is sinful, and you should pay penance to atone and gain absolution -- at least, that seems to be the theory under consideration by New Jersey's Gov. Jon S. Corzine( http://www.1010wins.com/Can-A-Fast-Food-Tax-Save-N-J--Hospitals/2093049 ). He said Tuesday he's open to using a "sin tax" to help provide funding for struggling hospitals. His comments came after Amy Mansue, of Children's Specialized Hospital, suggested a fast food tax during a meeting between Corzine and hospital leaders on proposed state hospital and health care aid cuts. The fast food tax idea came as hospitals warned Corzine that slicing aid would bring
closed hospitals, lost jobs, and longer waits for medical care.

Justin Wilson of the Center for Consumer Freedom in Washington, D.C. said, "Now is the last time anyone should be promoting such a regressive tax that targets some of the lowest income groups." While no one debates the importance of keeping hospitals open and well-funded, we also know that, for example, "well-intentioned" tobacco taxes have rarely ended up being spent on the purposes for which they were ostensibly meant. Politicians have always found it easy to justify taxing alcohol and cigarettes because they are "sinful," but to label fast food a sin is quite a stretch.

The people who consume the most fast food typically have the lowest income. So, Governor, you want the poor to fix your budget problems? That sounds like a sin.

DISPATCH: Aspirin, cigarettes, genes, and breast milk

Can aspirin cut breast cancer risk?
Can aspirin reduce the risk of breast cancer? A new study, looking at women who took aspirin daily, found their risk of developing estrogen receptor breast cancer cut by 16%

http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080430/hl_nm/cancer_breast_aspirin_dc;_ylt=... [29]. Usually, we would say that this is a statistical blip, but the study did involve 127,000 women aged fifty-one to seventy-two, so it is a promising first sign. Of course, we think more studies need to be conducted. Estrogen receptor or (ER)-positive breast cancer is fueled by estrogen; one theory holds that aspirin may interfere with this hormone's activity.

Gretchen Gierach of the National Cancer Institute said, "Even though it's a small reduction in relative risk, since ER-positive breast cancers are the more common types, if this result is confirmed to be true it could have potentially a big public health impact."

Strict smoking ban for Ontario, Canada
Banning smoking in bars and restaurants is one thing, but banning smoking in the car when children under the age of sixteen are present is a whole different issue

http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080430/hl_nm/smoking_dc;_ylt=AnGm3n8xgFHSZy... [30]. ACSH's Dr. Ross says, "it is true that secondhand smoke can have some effects on a child's health. However, trying to regulate smoking in a car will be ineffective, like many other well-intentioned laws." ACSH's Dr. Whelan says, "Kids spend more time with their smoking parents at home than in cars -- will they ban smoking in homes where children under sixteen live? The government is definitely overreaching here." We propose better education for parents about the health effects of secondhand smoking on children -- and reminders that parents are role models for their children, who often emulate what they see.

Under the proposed smoking ban in Ontario, Canada, drivers or passengers found smoking in a car carrying children under the age of sixteen would be fined, even if a window is open. Currently, only the province of Nova Scotia, Canada's Yukon territory, and a handful of U.S. states have banned smoking in cars with children.

Genetic testing
The House is expected soon to pass a bill that will bar employers and insurers from discriminating

Let's say you're a woman and you have a family history of breast cancer, should you get genetic testing? We at ACSH think that it is a good idea, but many women would be reluctant to get such information if they believed that their health insurer would also learn of the results and would increase their premiums if the result was positive. Some of the genetic tests we think would be beneficial include: a breast and ovarian cancer test, which looks at genes known as BRCA1 and BRCA2, and a colon cancer test that examines three genes linked to a form of the disease known as hereditary nonpolyposis colorectal cancer, or HNPCC. The results of these tests can influence patients' approach to getting appropriate screening tests: earlier and/or more frequent mammograms and breast MRI for the breast cancer gene, and colonoscopy if the colorectal cancer gene is detected.

Breastfeeding popularity increases
We think it is great news that more women are choosing to breastfeed. The number of new mothers who breastfeed is up to about 77% from 60% in 1993-1994, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention( http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120957691087056807.html?mod=todays_us_pe... [32] ). We at ACSH support whatever decision a mother makes, but we know not all women can or want to breastfeed. ACSH's Dr. Whelan has gotten a lot of flack for saying that breastfeeding should be a woman's choice and that women who choose not to should not be looked down upon. There are many reasons a woman may choose not to breastfeed, work being one of them. We think it is important to note that there is no solid evidence that breast-fed babies have better health outcomes than formula-fed babies.

Experts attributed the rise in breastfeeding to education campaigns that emphasize that breast milk is better than formula at protecting babies against disease. Another explanation may be a changing culture that accommodates nursing mothers, especially in the workplace.

DISPATCH: California Craziness, Measles, and NYC Calorie Counts
ACSH's Ruth Kava vacations in a toxic-laden zone: California
ACSH's Nutrition Director Ruth Kava just returned from a week-long vacation in California, and she would like to share with Morning Dispatch readers how she survived her encounter with toxins and carcinogens (we swear that she is not glowing green).

Dr. Kava says, "California is a dangerous place. Everywhere you look there are Proposition 65( http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.146/pub_detail.asp [33] ) warnings about carcinogens and toxins. The room service menu at a rather posh resort warned that any of the offered foods might contain substances "known to the state of California to cause cancer or reproductive harm." In particular, the list singled out French fries and potato chips as containing that dreaded carcinogen acrylamide( http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.182/pub_detail.asp [34] )! Kind of makes you lose your appetite. But wait! Not only is the food purportedly dangerous, so is everything else -- there are warnings on gas stations, drug stores, and groceries -- everywhere, in fact!

Wouldn't it be simpler to just have a sign at all airports and other entry points that the state itself might be dangerous to health? It would save a lot of money if stores and manufacturers didn't have
to list individual signs.

California moving towards a bill against bisphenol-A (BPA)
We were already dismayed that the Senate Health Committee voted to approve a new bill against BPA in California (http://www.californiachronicle.com/articles/60421). If approved, the bill would ban any detectable level of the chemical BPA from all toys and child care products sold in the state of California. But to make matters worse, they named the bill the "Toxin-Free Toddlers and Babies Act." Obviously, with a title like that, a "Nay" vote would be taken to mean you were against toddlers and babies. Give us a break. The whole BPA panic is now surpassing the phthalates scare, and like most scares originating in California, it is only a matter of time before it blows over to the East. Dr. Whelan asks, "How can manufacturers develop unique products to be sold only in the state of California? This is sheer madness."

ACSH's Jeff Stier is going to California
Jeff Stier will be going to California in the Los Angeles area, the week of May 12, and would love to meet up with any of the Morning Dispatch readers. If you're interested, you can contact him toll free: (866) 905-2694.

Measles outbreak
Parents choosing to opt out of vaccinating their children are starting to see the consequences in measles outbreaks. We believe what is driving parents' decision not to vaccinate is the unfounded fear of autism. ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross says, "Parents who indulge their 'personal beliefs' by skipping vaccinations go against medical science and put all children -- not just their own -- at risk." Parents cannot rely on community immunity to protect their children.

Already between January 1 and April 25, 2008 a total of sixty-four confirmed measles cases were preliminarily reported to the CDC, the most reported by this point in the year for any year since 2001 (http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm57e501a1.htm?s_cid=mm57e501a1). Of the sixty-four cases, fifty-four were associated with importation of measles from other countries into the United States, and sixty-three of the patients were unvaccinated or had unknown or undocumented vaccination status.

Crain's poll on calorie posting
Crain's Poll asked the following question (http://www.crainsnewyork.com/apps/pbcs.dll/pollstats?category=poll&ID=238): _Starting Monday, the city will begin citing restaurants that don't post calorie counts on their menus. What impact do you think the new rule will have on eating habits and restaurants?_ So far, 241 people have responded to the poll, and an overwhelming 78.8% of respondents think neither consumers nor restaurants will change their behavior, 15.8% believe consumers will stop eating at high-calorie restaurants, and only 5.4% think that restaurants will stop serving high-calorie foods.

One respondent said, "I don't think restaurants or diners are going to change their habits nor should they. However, I think this will induce restaurants to offer healthier choices on their menus, co-existent with the fully-loaded choices we love." Another comment made was, "Most of the problems in the world are caused by the good intentions of government politicians and bureaucrats. The costs and wasteful efforts that will go into making this needless law will harm far
more people than the benefits derived from its enforcement." And: "The Nanny Society that Big Brother is subtly creeping into our daily lives will only increase cost, provide unnecessary information that will have a minor early impact before all things go back to normal. It is unfortunate that personal responsibility is a casualty."

As for the calorie posting, ACSH's Dr. Whelan will be going over to the McDonald's on 70th street and Amsterdam today to see if they have posted the calories on their menu board. We predict they are going to hold off as long as they can until the fines start or they win the appeal to overturn the decision that makes calorie-posting on the menu boards mandatory for chain restaurants.

DISPATCH: Autism, Anti-Psychotics, Doubt, Fat, and Henry Miller

Autism and genes
Although we do not know the cause or causes of autism, scientists have long suspected that genetics may play a role. Today, another study adds support to the theory that there may be an inherited component to autism( http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080505/sc_nm/autism_parents_dc_1 [38 ] ). Being born to a schizophrenic parent or a mother with psychiatric problems almost doubled a child's risk of developing autism. The study also found higher rates of depression and personality disorders among mothers, but not fathers, of autistic children. More research will be needed to focus on the relative roles of genetics versus environmental influences. However, establishing an association between autism and psychiatric disorders may help researchers focus on possible causative factors that are shared among these disorders.

American kids more likely to be on meds
American children take anti-psychotic medicines at about six times the rate of children in the United Kingdom, according to a new UK study( http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,354129,00.html [39 ] ). So the question of the day is: Are American kids being overtreated, or are UK kids being under-treated?

In actuality, prescription drug use among kids is rising in both countries, and the most commonly used drugs were those used to treat autism and hyperactivity. The discrepancy observed between the two countries could be explained by a recent report in _The Lancet_, which suggests that the UK's universal health care system limits prescribing practices there. The report also said direct-to-consumer ads are more common in the United States. These ads raise consumer awareness and demand for medication.

We have been seeing a rise in autism and hyperactivity, so it makes sense that prescriptions would also be on the rise.

Book: _Doubt Is Their Product_
We can add one more thing to the laundry list of deeds the cigarette companies are responsible for: creating distrust of science and scientists.

uncertainty harms health and the environment. ACSH's Dr. Whelan says, "the author is trying to draw a parallel between the tobacco industry and the chemical industry, but there isn't one." Dr. Ross thinks "if you say there is no evidence of harm from insert-chemical-name, then they say you are being paid by industry. The difference between smoking, which had huge amounts of data against it, and the current chemical phobia, is that there is no evidence that environmental exposures have ever harmed anyone."

David Michaels details how Big Tobacco originated the cottage industry of doubt in the 1950s. His hypothesis is that many of the same scientists and public relations firms worked first to defend tobacco before moving on to chromium, asbestos, and other toxic substances. They did so not by denying harm, he claims, but by raising questions about its extent.

Can you really lump all industries in together? Whatever happened to letting science speak for itself?

Fat cells, why won't you go away?
The body tends to maintain a constant number of fat cells. Ten percent of the fat cells may die each year, but they are quickly replaced with new fat cells( http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/05/health/research/05fat.html?_r=1&partne... ). Losing or gaining weight only affects the amount of fat stored in the cells and not the numbers. This is not new to us at ACSH. But the researchers raised a valid question: What determines how many fat cells are in a person's body? Is there a way to intervene so people end up with fewer fat cells when they reach adulthood? And could obesity be treated by making fat cells die faster than they are produced? Unfortunately, the researchers can't answer those questions yet. One thing that has become clear over the past couple of decades is that the body has redundant controls to maintain weight and that interfering with one system may just be balanced out by another. Finding a cure for obesity may still be many years away.

Henry Miller Award ceremony, only a few days away
There was a buzz at the ACSH breakfast table this morning as we finalize details for Wednesday's Henry Miller Award lunch. Excitement is growing.

DISPATCH: Short and Demented, Young and Smoking, Miller and His Admirers

Quote of the day
"Journalists should keep their eye on the ball and focus on the quality of the science rather than the character of its sponsors -- and demand that pharmascolds do the same." David A. Shaywitz and Thomas P. Stossel in the _Weekly Standard_.

Henry Miller Award Luncheon
We are excited and busy preparing for our luncheon tomorrow, as ACSH trustees and supporters begin arriving from around the country to honor Dr. Miller. Morning Dispatch will take a hiatus on Wednesday, but for those of you unable to join us, we will report all the details in Thursday's Morning Dispatch. We would like to let you know that it's not too late to donate in honor of Dr. Henry Miller. Also, we would like to thank all the members of the award event committee for their generous contributions:
HPV vaccination, not quite there yet

A new study revealed that 49% of almost 10,000 parent-respondents intended to vaccinate a daughter against HPV if she were age nine to twelve, and 68% intended to vaccinate if the daughter was thirteen to fifteen. ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross says, "This is still not acceptable. The vaccine has been recommended for two years now. If we were recommending vaccination against measles, we would not be satisfied with a 49% vaccination rate." ACSH's Dr. Whelan says, "The good news is, I actually thought it would be worse." The results of the study indicate that we should be educating parents that the vaccine will not promote promiscuity.

Study author Dr. Jessica Kahn, a pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, said, "it's not surprising that parents would feel more comfortable letting an older daughter get the vaccine." ([http://abcnews.go.com/Health/Healthday/story?id=4783884&page=1](http://abcnews.go.com/Health/Healthday/story?id=4783884&page=1)) We remember a similar situation when the hepatitis B vaccine was first introduced: It was rejected by some because the virus can be transmitted via sexual intercourse. We need to drive home the message to parents that the vaccine doesn't just prevent cervical cancer but also HPV-related diseases.
including oral cancer and genital warts as well.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention currently recommends that eleven- and twelve-year-old girls be targeted for vaccination, since girls will not be sexually active at that age and have not yet been exposed to any HPV strains, and thus will achieve maximum protection.

Limb length and dementia and Alzheimer's and ibuprofen
There are many studies that draw conclusions based on associations, and two examples were in the news today. The first one is about limb length and risk of developing dementia or Alzheimer's disease, and the second study was about taking painkillers and Alzheimer's disease.

In the limb length study, researchers said women with the shortest arm spans were 50% more likely to develop dementia and Alzheimer's disease than women with longer arm spans(http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080505/hl_nm/memory_short_dc;_ylt=AnqBWjI3p... [43]). And the longer a woman's leg from floor to knee, the lower her risk for dementia. The researcher hypothesize that short limbs may be a sign of nutritional deficits early in life that ultimately play a role in brain development.

In the other study, researchers found that people who took the painkiller ibuprofen for more than five years had a 40% lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease(http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080505/hl_nm/alzheimers_ibuprofen_dc;_ylt=A... [44]). There have been studies that link Alzheimer's disease with inflammation, and researchers believe that anti-inflammatory drugs might help delay onset of the disease.

Dr. Whelan cautions people not to confuse association with causation. So take these so called conclusions with a grain of salt. These studies are often based on small, preliminary studies and have not been peer-reviewed or replicated, and they often never will be.

Can smoking bans prevent teens from picking up the habit?
A friend of ACSH's, Dr. Michael Siegel of Boston University School of Public Health, is a lead author on a new study that examines smoking bans and their influence on teens' smoking habits(http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,354262,00.html [45]). This is one more example of how smoking bans can have a positive effect on public health and may also prevent teens from initiating smoking in the first place. The study found that having a smoker as a parent or a close friend was a factor in predicting whether children experiment with cigarettes. But tough bans -- smoking bans in restaurants and other public places -- had a bigger influence on whether smoking grew into a habit, reducing young people's chances of becoming smokers by 40%.

DISPATCH: Awards, IUDs, Trout, and Burma
Event a big success
We are pleased to announce that yesterday's Henry I. Miller Award event was a huge success. We once more give our thanks to the members of the committee who supported the presentation luncheon. Melanie Kirkpatrick (from the _Wall Street Journal_'s editorial board) and Ned Crabb (the _Wall Street Journal_'s letter-to-the-editor editor for nearly twenty years) related their personal experiences on working with Dr. Miller's op-eds and letters over the past two decades. Other guests from the media also offered tributes: John Stossel from ABC's _20/20_ related how Dr.
Miller's commentaries (and other commentaries from ACSH) inspired him to take on junk science at ABC. And longtime radio commentator Barry Farber described Dr. Miller and other ACSH scientists as his "heroes" in fighting hyperbole about health risks.

ACSH was pleased and proud to honor Dr. Henry Miller for his prolific career in producing editorial commentaries on public health issues. It is our hope that the creation of this award -- to honor scientists who speak out on health issues -- will provide an incentive to other scientists to come out of their classrooms and laboratories to take on those who distort science.

In her opening comments, ACSH's Dr. Whelan noted that in the early 1980s when she first met Robert Bartley, the long-term editor of the _Wall Street Journal_ editorial page*, he asked a very pertinent question: "Why are scientists mute? Why don't they speak up when science is misrepresented?" She explained that Mr. Bartley had hit on the essence of the reason she founded ACSH: to motivate scientists to enter the public dialogue. Dr. Henry Miller, she noted, is the "poster scientist" for the original goals of ACSH: fighting daily in the media for the cause of sound science.

*ACSH was very pleased that Bob Bartley's widow, Edith, attended the awards lunch yesterday.

IUDs and endometrial cancer

We don't hear very much about intrauterine devices (IUD) in the news, so we were surprised to read this morning( [http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080506/hl_nm/iud_dc;_ylt=AtXJMBApPy71ORKFx8... [46] ] that IUDs are associated with a 40% reduction in the risk of endometrial cancer, similar to the cancer protection provided by oral contraceptives. ACSH's Dr. Ross says, "If you are in a long term, monogamous relationship and STDs are not a concern, IUDs could be the perfect contraceptives, since they require little maintenance." We are curious as to how the copper IUD could have such a profound effect on reducing the risk of endometrial cancer. Of course, this report is only preliminary -- the data have been presented at a medical meeting, and the study has not been subjected to the peer review process needed for journal publication, yet.

We are a little perplexed that only 2% of women in the U.S. choose IUDs instead of other available contraceptives, whereas worldwide they are the most widely used reversible contraceptive. Some IUDs release small amounts of the hormone progesterone, but there is another type made of copper without hormones.

Red dye, blue dye, and rainbow trout

A few decades ago, red dye was taken off the market because it was linked to cancer in rodent tests. Now scientists from Oregon State University are saying that Red No. 40 and Blue No. 2 may fight cancer.( [http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,354433,00.html [47] ] ACSH's Dr. Kava says, "I can see the headlines now: M&Ms vs. Cancer."

The researchers fed rainbow trout aflatoxin -- which is linked to liver cancer -- and then fed dyes to some of the trout. The dye-eating trout ended up with fewer liver tumors. Even though aflatoxin is not a huge problem in the U.S., a practical application could be to add the dye to peanut butter -- since aflatoxin is made by mold that grows on peanuts. However, don't go looking for blue peanut butter just yet -- more studies are to be done on animals. Our guess is it's the rats' turn. We here
at ACSH are dubious about the applicability of animal cancer tests to human disease. As Dr. Kava wondered aloud: "Are fish cancer tests more or less reliable than rat cancer tests? I'm still unconvinced that these tests have anything at all to do with human cancer."

Myanmar risks huge public health crisis
Typically, a natural disaster in foreign country is not something we would discuss, since it's outside our mandate, but we cannot help but be horrified at what is going on in Myanmar(\[http://apnews.myway.com/article/20080507/D90GR35G2.html\]). A devastating cyclone killed perhaps as many as 100,000, and the UN said some 1 million people were homeless. The socialist junta ruling the country is allowing very little foreign aid to enter, at a time when the citizens need it the most. Dr. Whelan said, "The number one public health concern right now is clean water. A disaster like this reminds you of the very basic public health necessities." Dr. Ross noted, "Contaminated water is responsible for most deaths in infants and children around the world." We hope that those who live in the devastated areas of Myanmar (also known as Burma) will get the help that they so desperately need, or we will see a huge rise in the death toll.

DISPATCH: Arthritis, Cancer, Birth Control, and Debris vs. BPA
Half of Diabetics Have Arthritis
We were truly astounded by how many people with diabetes have arthritis(\[http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080508/hl_nm/diabetes_arthritis_dc;_ylt=Akk...\]). Although the report was unclear about what type of arthritis -- osteoarthritis or rheumatoid arthritis -- and which type of diabetes -- type 1 or type 2 -- it referred to, people with both conditions are highly unlikely to exercise because of the pain. ACSH's Dr. Kava wondered "if the arthritis was a result of high glucose level -- which would be observed in both types of diabetes -- or resulted from obesity, which can cause type 2 diabetes and puts more stress on weight bearing-joints." ACSH's Dr. Ross added, "This is a real shame, and it's a vicious cycle. People with pain have less exercise tolerance, thus reducing the ability to control weight and diabetes. Diabetics should be encouraged to walk, swim, or bike, which puts less stress on the joints and can be beneficial to both diabetes and arthritis overall."

Researchers found that more than half of U.S. adults diagnosed with diabetes also have arthritis. Nationwide, the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention found 46.4 million adults have arthritis and 20.6 million have diabetes.

War on Cancer
The call for a new "war on cancer"(\[http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5j4O2dUIpx6RjiTNCGkhkQRaFBtfwD90HMBGG1\]) cleverly ignores two basic realities. We know the cause of 35% of cancer: cigarette smoking. But ACSH bets that cancer warriors Armstrong, Kennedy, and Edwards do no even go near that topic. Second, cancer remains to a large extent a disease of old age. Our focus in fighting cancer should not be wiping out cancer entirely but focusing on known preventable causes of cancer -- particularly when they occur in the younger age groups.

Lance Armstrong said Thursday, "It's time for our country to refocus and relaunch a comprehensive war on this disease." He should know better: Cancer is not "this disease" but many
different diseases with different causes, treatments, and vulnerable groups.

We at ACSH are skeptical when we see celebrities talk about health issues in general. They are well meaning but often ill-informed( http://www.acsh.org/publications/pubID.1668/pub_detail.asp [51] ). The last time we saw a celebrity testify before Congress, we weren't impressed( http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.54/news_detail.asp [52] ).

Activist Group Take a Stand Against the Birth-Control Patch
A U.S. "consumer group" is urging the Food and Drug Administration to pull Johnson & Johnson's birth control patch from the market after studies found an increased risk of dangerous blood clots( http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080508/hl_nm/johnsonandjohnson_patch_dc;_yl... [53] ).

ACSH's Dr. Whelan says, "One remarkable observation about this news report is that Dr. Sidney Wolfe is not characterized for what he is: a long-term bitter critic of the pharmaceutical industry. If a less biased scientist who was associated with industry were quoted, he or she would have been tarred as an industry-funded liar. But someone attacking a pharmaceutical company is given a free pass regarding potential bias." We think that the discussion of risks and benefits should be between a doctor and a patient, and Dr. Wolfe does not belong in the conversation. Dr. Ross noted, "some people may be more at risk of blood clots, such as smokers, people who are inactive, vein disease, etc., so maybe they are better off with the pill; this doesn't mean that it's not a good option for otherwise healthy people. Dr. Wolfe's only suggestion, as usual, is to pull it off the market."

As of January this year, warnings about the increased risk of blood clots have been included on the patch's label. This was due to a study of women ages 15 to 44, which found that blood clots were about twice as likely in women using the patch versus birth control pills. The FDA position currently is that the patch is safe and effective when used as directed and urged patients to talk to their doctors about the risk. We at ACSH agree with this advisory.

DISPATCH: Real risk vs. bogus risks

Real Risk
This morning ACSH's Jeff Stier was late to work because while emerging from the subway at 66th Street on this very windy day he witnessed a woman get hit by a stray piece of wood flying off a construction site. The woman was hit on the nose by a two-foot long piece of wood and her nose was bleeding. Jeff escorted the woman to a building to get help. We are reminded that on windy days here in New York City, flying construction materials can be a real hazard, as if the construction accidents that occur regardless of the weather weren't problem enough. We could easily recall close calls with flying debris or stories we hear on the news. For instance, not too long ago, a sheet of window glass that was being installed in a building in Times Square was blown loose and crashed into the street below. Fortunately, no one was hurt. Although this all may seem anecdotal, all it takes is a good gust of wind to send unsecured objects flying off roofs or scaffolds. Message to Mayor Bloomberg: flying debris is a _real_ risk to life and health. Trace levels of trans fats( http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/19/nyregion/19fall.html?_r=2&oref=slogin&... [54] ) in restaurant food, for example, are not.

Bogus Risk
Lately, we keep seeing more and more press releases -- go ahead and insert a product name here -- that say something along the lines of "Our products are bisphenol-A- and phthalate-free and do not have the negative effects that are now being linked to most plastics." As ACSH has long reported, plastic products with BPA and/or phthalates pose no hazard to human health. But there is always someone out there ready to make a quick buck by capitalizing on an unfounded fear.

When you compare the relative risk of being hit by flying debris to the reactions to bogus health risks such as BPA or phthalates, you realize how ridiculous the reactions of consumers, activists, and industry have been lately. Do you stop walking outside because it's windy and there is a small chance of being hit by a stray piece of wood? No. Do you stop drinking from plastic bottles because there is a risk of cancer developing in _rats_ but not in humans? The answer should also be no. Don't give in to the hype.

DISPATCH: Breasts and Colons, Flu and Autism

Breast feeding, breast cancer, and meaningless stats

In the never-ending quest to find the cause and cure for breast cancer, scientists will leave no stone unturned. While it is usually a good idea to be thorough and to investigate all options, we don't appreciate having our time wasted with data-dredging. A study( [http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080509/hl_nm/breast_cancer_risk_dc](http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080509/hl_nm/breast_cancer_risk_dc) ) looked at adult women who were breastfed as infants and found they had a 17% lower risk of developing breast cancer than those who were not breastfed, unless they were first-born, in which case their risk wasn't lower. ACSH's Dr. Whelan says, "It's embarrassing professionally that the researchers would submit, or that peer-reviewed journals would publish, this stuff."

One of the authors of this "study," Hazel B. Nichols of the University of Wisconsin, compounds the bizarre approach of this data-dredging report, while simultaneously exposing her own agenda, when she notes in the journal _Epidemiology_ that "A woman's age at childbirth helps predict the levels of environmental contaminants in her breast milk, and studies have suggested a possible link between increased breast cancer risk and the accumulation of these contaminants." In fact, despite years of attempting to find some actual link between environmental chemicals and breast cancer, no such link has been found. It is quite clear that we have learned nothing new about breast cancer from this study.
Less prep, more pep for colonoscopy
A new two-liter bowel-cleansing solution used for colonoscopy appears to work as well as the standard four-liter solution and is more acceptable to patients, researchers reported( http://www.reuters.com/article/healthNews/idUSKEN9557382008080509 [56] ). The new solution includes ascorbic acid (vitamin C). Dr. Whelan notes, "This is a lifesaving diagnostic and therapeutic tool, and we want to encourage people to get it. The worst part of getting a colonoscopy is the preparation. So, if they have found a way to make the preparation more tolerable, it's really good news." We cannot emphasize enough the importance of doing this regularly after the age of fifty, since it dramatically cuts your risk of getting colon cancer. If a polyp is found during the exam, it can be removed immediately, thus eliminating the chance it will become cancerous.

Colon cancer is the second-leading cause of cancer-related death in the U.S. after lung cancer. Some people with family history of colon cancer should start getting exams in their thirties or even earlier.

Flu vaccine makers roll the dice and hope it pays off
The five companies that make the flu vaccine for the U.S. plan to make 143 million doses for the 2008/2009 season( http://www.cnn.com/2008/HEALTH/conditions/05/09/flu.vaccine.ap/index.html [57] ). This is up from last year when only 140 million doses were produced. Dr Whelan says, "I am wondering why they are going out on a limb like this and are making so many doses. If you look at past numbers, they make 140 million and only use about 50 million, and then they have to discard the extra doses at the end of the season."

Vaccine manufacturers are taking into account that the vaccine for this season was only 44% effective -- two of the three strains for the current season were not good matches -- and expect it may affect peoples' decisions to get vaccinated. However, they are confident that education campaigns and federal health officials' newly expanded recommendations for annual flu shots for virtually all U.S. children older than six months (which could mean an additional 30 million vaccinations) warrant the plans for extra doses.

Parents try to weigh in on autism debate
In 2004, the Institute of Medicine said there was no credible evidence linking vaccines containing the preservative thimerosal to autism in children. But thousands of families feel differently, primarily based on anecdotal evidence. Dr. Whelan says, "This is a case of informed scientists vs. uninformed parents. It doesn't happen very often that there is 100% consensus among scientists, but this time there is. Parents think their opinion should have equal weight, but should it?" ACSH's Dr. Ross added, "thimerosal was removed from most vaccines in recent years -- except for the flu vaccine -- though there never was any credible evidence that vaccines containing thimerosal caused autism."

Around 4,900 families have filed with the U.S. Court of Claims alleging that vaccines caused autism and other neurological problems in their children( http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20080512/ap_on_go_ot/autism_court_case_10 [58] ). Lawyers for the families are presenting three different theories of how vaccines caused autism. Understandably, their lack of objectivity means they are not able to judge scientific research and may reach
incorrect conclusions based on limited observations. It is tragic, however, that scientific policy decisions are being swayed by trial lawyers rather than science. If the hearings result in more damage awards for allegedly vaccine-injured children, parents will increasingly shun getting their kids vaccinated. Such superstition has recently resulted in several epidemics of measles in the U.S.

Honorary seats at the ACSH table
Today we are giving two honorary seats at the ACSH table to the Governor of Minnesota, Tim Pawlenty, and Tara Parker-Pope, columnist for New York Times health section, for contributing to sound science. Read below to find out why.

Governor vetoes bill banning two chemicals
Governor Time Pawlenty vetoed a bill banning chemicals because there is a lack of scientific evidence. (http://www.kare11.com/news/ts_article.aspx?storyid=510661) Dr. Ross says "we extend our gratitude to the governor for considering the actual scientific facts, and not reflexly acquiescing in the political stampede." The legislation would have banned the sale of two chemicals: the fire retardant decabromodiphenyl ether (DECA) and certain vinyl plasticizers, phthalates.

Pawlenty said he is willing to consider limits or bans on the chemicals in the future, "but such steps should be based on sound science." We also saw a copy of the governors veto letter that he sent to the Minnesota Senate. One part we particularly admire was when he said, "Flame retardants are used in a variety of products, including products designed to protect children. Banning an effective flame retardant without assurances that safe and reasonable alternatives are in place is unwise public policy"

Three cheers, Governor! We only wish there were more public officials out there like you--committed to sound science.

Tara Parker-Pope: Simple solutions for your heart
A good article in a New York Times Health supplement today(http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/13/health/13heart.html) discussed some simple ways you can help protect your heart, and it doesn’t always have to be about diet, exercise and medication. A quote from the article sums up what we like best about her recommendations: "Just a few small changes — eating more fish, vegetables, nuts and fiber — can have a major impact on your risk for heart problems. For some people, drinking moderate amounts of wine may offer additional benefits. Even a 55-year-old man who is about 20 pounds overweight and does not exercise regularly will have a heart-disease risk far below average if he regularly consumes fish, nuts, fiber and vegetables and drinks moderate amounts of wine." Although, as Dr. Kava points out, "she does not specify age groups when it comes to alcohol recommendations." Overall her article is sensible and doesn’t give into any alarmist scares like mercury in fish or trans fats.

Cigarette bill a big joke at smokers expense
Some joke--this bill is not funny at all, and will do serious and possibly permanent damage to America's public health by distracting us from real, effective approaches to reducing the unacceptable toll of smoking. Many people are questioning why menthol, the most widely used
cigarette flavoring(http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/13/business/13menthol.html?_r=1&hp&oref=s…[61] ) and the most popular cigarette choice of African-American smokers, is receiving special protection as Congress tries to regulate tobacco for the first time. Dr. Kava notes "there is no doubt that Philip Morris is just trying to protect its consumer base." OK--but why are various "public health" groups--like the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, the American Heart Association, and the American Lung Association--going along with this "Phillip Morris Protection Bill"? Not to mention Sen. Kennedy and Rep. Waxman?

The legislation, which would supposedly give the Food and Drug Administration the power to oversee tobacco products, would try to reduce smoking's allure for young people by banning most flavored cigarettes, including clove and cinnamon. So why exclude menthol from the list of flavor additives? The answer of course is that mentholated brands are so crucial to the American cigarette industry. They make up more than one-fourth of the $70 billion American cigarette market--and are particularly popular among African American smokers. Dr. Whelan notes "This bill is fine-tuned to help protect the cigarette makers, it is just a big joke." Dr. Ross adds "How can they say that this is a public health bill?"

Jeff Stier Quoted on WebMD
ACSH's Jeff Stier was quoted on WebMD in an article titled Acrylamide in Diet: Cancer Risk(http://www.webmd.com/cancer/news/20080508/acrylamide-in-diet-cancer-risk[62] )? Acrylamide, which is found in French Fries, potato chips, bread and coffee and many other foods, has been shown to cause cancer in high-dose animal studies. Stier responded, "They went looking for an association in this study and they found one. But people should not confuse association with causation." (Unfortunately, the writer added the disclaimer that "ACSH is funded by the food industry." While this falsehood tends to undercut anything we have to say about food, in fact WebMD will correct and retract that assertion shortly).

We have long said here at ACSH that there is no compelling evidence that acrylamide, when consumed in foods such as French fries and bread, poses a risk of human cancer(http://www.acsh.org/news/newsID.303/news_detail.asp[63]).

Follow-up on the flu vaccine
The one place you would expect flu vaccine promotion to be the heaviest is in a doctor’s office. However, a new study found that doctors are not taking advantage of these opportunities to vaccinate people against influenza every year(http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080512/hl_nm/flu_vaccines_usa_dc[64]). Flu vaccine maker Sanofi-Pasteur said "it has evidence that 25 million high-risk people visited a doctor every year during recent flu seasons and did not get a flu shot. Only a fraction of the people who should get flu shots do. The CDC says only 40 percent of doctors, nurses and other health care workers get the shot, putting themselves and patients at risk.

We wonder why more doctors aren't promoting the flu vaccine, especially since getting people to go to the doctor is usually the hardest part. Once the doctor has a vaccine candidate right there, he or she might as well take advantage of the opportunity. Along with not telling patients to quit smoking, this news about poor doctor-patient communication is sadly disappointing--the worse for
the fact that it takes no time and no money to render such good advice.

**DISPATCH: Prescriptions, Cancer, Awards, Alzheimer’s, and Exercise**

**Prescription folly**
The media is good at spinning stories to make anything to do with pharmaceuticals look bad. Today's story in the _Wall Street Journal_ is no different. Data gathered by Medco Health Solutions Inc indicated that more than half of all insured Americans are taking prescription medicines regularly for chronic health problems. Instead of focusing on the fact more people need and are now taking blood pressure and cholesterol-lowering medicines, they blame pharmaceutical industries advertising. A spokesman for the American Heart Association says that the proportion of Americans on chronic medications will only increase -- and he perceives this as a bad thing. But there is no mention of the fact that the prevalence of the medical problems they treat is increasing and that that's why their use is going up. ACSH's Dr. Whelan notes, "This is good news that is spun as bad. People who need these medications are getting them." ACSH's Dr. Ross adds, "These medicines are keeping us healthier, living longer, and out of hospitals."

**Oral cancer**
A clinical trial testing therapies for advanced tongue and tonsil cancers has found that more than 40% of the tumors in men were infected with Human Papillomavirus (HPV) (http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/13/health/13canc.html?ex=1211428800&en=9e... [65]). Dr. Whelan says, "Part of epidemiology is identifying changing demographics, and we are seeing that now with oral cancer. Oral cancer used to be a disease affecting older men who smoked, and now it is appearing more frequently in middle-aged women and men regardless of smoking habits." Of an estimated 28,900 cases of oral cancer a year, 18,550 are in men. We think this is one more reason that both young girls and boys need to be vaccinated against HPV, which has been approved as a protective agent against cervical-cancer-causing strains. Protection against oral cancer may also be a significant benefit -- although studies need to be done to confirm this.

Dr. Whelan adds, "The problem with oral cancer is it can be hard to diagnose. I had a friend with oral cancer, and they kept misdiagnosing her, and by the time it was caught it had already progressed to stage four -- a late, untreatable stage. The encouraging news is that HPV-related oral cancer may be, to a large extent, preventable by the newly introduced vaccinations."

**Henry Miller Award photos on ACSH website**
A slide show is available on ACSH's website from the Henry I. Miller Award event held last Wednesday. Check it out here( http://www.acsh.org/events/eventID.41/event_detail.asp [68] ).

**Biological link to smoking and lung cancer**
A protein responsible for repairing damaged DNA may be one important link in explaining how smoking causes lung cancer, U.S. researchers reported on Tuesday. Dr. Whelan says, "We have always known through epidemiology that smoking and lung cancer had a strong link, but we never nailed down what the biological link is." And Dr. Ross adds, "If we could understand the mechanism behind lung cancer, we might be able find a way to protect against it."

Lung cells exposed to cigarette smoke produce less of a protein, called FANCD2, the team at Oregon Health & Science University Cancer Institute reported. Without FANCD2, damaged DNA
can cause cells to proliferate out of control instead of destroying themselves as normal cells do.

Lung cancer is the number one cancer killer in the U.S. Although the study is very preliminary, this could be an important step forward in the search for an effective agent for treatment and prevention.

Alzheimer's patients speak out
At a town hall event held Monday in Washington, DC by the Alzheimer's Association, people in the early stages of the disease talk about what living with Alzheimer's Disease (AD) and dementia is really like. Dr. Whelan says, "I have a friend who diagnosed himself. He was a clergyman, and he knew something was going on when he couldn't remember his scriptures like he used to." One thing that really caught our eye about this story was the strong genetic link. Chuck Jackson, one of the speakers at the event and an AD victim, said that AD affected his grandfather, a dozen aunts and uncles, his mother, a brother, plus every year a growing list of cousins. The disease typically struck them at young ages -- meaning under age sixty-five.

Dr. Ross notes, "When I was in medical school, Alzheimer's had a paragraph in a text book. There is always a question as to whether a person is experiencing senile dementia caused by, for example, multiple small strokes, or AD. Although not much can be done for AD patients, you can some times make progress with other types of dementia, depending on the cause."

It is estimated that as many as 5 million people nationwide have Alzheimer's Disease, and that 500,000 fall into the pre-sixty-five "early onset" category.

Exercise at an earlier age may help reduce breast cancer
Women who were physically active as teens and young adults were 23% less likely to develop premenopausal breast cancer than women who grew up sedentary, researchers reported today in the _Journal of the National Cancer Institute_. We think this is a case of association rather than causation, but recommending moderate exercise at a younger age -- or any age -- won't hurt and will go a long way towards protecting against a range of ailments such as diabetes or hypertension. The researchers' theory behind recommending exercise at a younger age is that physical activity itself lowers estrogen levels, whereas in middle age and beyond, exercise is encouraged to keep off the pounds. After menopause, fat tissue is a chief source of estrogen.

DISPATCH: Prager, McCaughey, Quaid, PETA, FDA, and Vioxx
Hononary seat at the table goes to the FDA today
Today, two commonsense stories have lifted our spirits: an FDA spokesman defended the agency's evaluation process on bisphenol-A (BPA), which led them to declare that the tiny amounts of BPA in our consumer goods are not a health threat, and a multi-million dollar Vioxx verdict was reversed. One month ago, ACSH's Dr. Whelan was criticizing the FDA in a _New York Post_ piece for not speaking up, so we were pleasantly surprised to see the FDA finally defending the safety of BPA. Read below for more on the story.

ACSH's Jeff Stier on Dennis Prager Show
Jeff Stier will be talking about secondhand smoke on _The Dennis Prager Show_ at 2pm eastern time. Dennis Prager has been broadcasting in L.A. since 1982 and is syndicated all over the
FDA defends plastic bottles, finally!
A spokesman for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration testified before a hostile U.S. Senate committee yesterday and repeated the agency's position on plastic bottles([http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24619958/](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/24619958/)). Nelson Alderson, the FDA's associate commissioner for science, said that the FDA sees no reason to tell consumers to stop using products such as baby bottles made with bisphenol-A. We sincerely compliment them for speaking out, since such courage under pressure from the FDA is rare. We hope we see such science-based testimony more often!

Alderson said, "a large body of available evidence shows that products such as liquid or food containers made with BPA are safe." However, this opinion was not greeted warmly by some members in the senate. Democratic Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts told Alderson, "The FDA could hardly be doing less." Sen. Charles Schumer, a New York Democrat, said, "Parents always err on the side of caution when it comes to their kids' health. We think that the law should do the same." ACSH's Dr. Ross says, "Schumer thinks that the government should take the most conservative approach, but what if we applied that conservative approach to everything, what then? Should we pass a law giving vaccine exemptions to all children because 'parents err on the side of caution'? This sort of tactic, of taking things off the market and proving guilt or innocence after, makes as much sense as a firing squad shooting first and asking questions later."

Vioxx verdict reversed
A Texas appeals court overturned a multimillion-dollar verdict yesterday against Merck & Co([http://www.1010wins.com/Multi-Million-Dollar-Vioxx-Verdict-Reversed/2186989](http://www.1010wins.com/Multi-Million-Dollar-Vioxx-Verdict-Reversed/2186989)). Dr. Ross notes, "This particular case against Merck was completely outrageous. The deceased patient, whose family was the plaintiff, was on Vioxx for only about a month -- not to mention he smoked for thirty years and had a previous heart attack and heart bypass surgery before going on the drug." The reversal is good news for Merck.

In April 2006, a jury awarded $32 million to the widow of seventy-one-year-old Leonel Garza, a short-term Vioxx user who died of a heart attack in 2001. That award was $7 million for compensatory damages and $25 million for punitive damages and was later was cut to about $7.75 million under Texas law limiting damages.

Dairy, weight-loss, and animal rights activists
Recent claims that low-fat dairy products or calcium can help people lose weight are untrue, according to a review of the published scientific literature([http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080514/hl_nm/dairy_weight_dc;_ylt=AnoWKrjCWr..](http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080514/hl_nm/dairy_weight_dc;_ylt=AnoWKrjCWr..)). This is not news to us, ACSH's Dr. Kava notes. "The evidence is not compelling. But what is surprising about the story is that there is no disclaimer at the end." The Physicians’ Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), quoted in the story, is a group closely associated with PETA, the animal rights group. Their agenda is to stop milk consumption entirely. Whelan adds, "There is no transparency in this story."
Dr. Amy Joy Lanou, an assistant professor in the department of health and wellness at the University of North Carolina, is quick to suggest switching to water. "We drink way too many of our daily allotted calories in milk, milkshakes, lattes, sodas, and other sweetened beverages. Water is healthy and naturally calorie-free," Lanou said. "Choosing water instead of milk means you can enjoy more nutrient-dense foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes and stay within your energy needs."

Skim milk offers plenty of nutrients, with little fat or calories. Why doesn't she just suggest switching to low or non-fat dairy products? We know why.

Declaring war on obesity using cigarette strategy
Should we attack the national obesity crisis using the same techniques we used to fight cigarette smoking? That is what a researcher from the World Health Organization thinks. He proposes that we put warning labels on food, tax high calorie foods, pass laws to restrict access, and eliminate food advertising. Will such techniques work -- and make us thinner? No, most likely not. Cigarette smoking is inherently different from obesity as a health issue. We can encourage people to live without cigarettes -- but we cannot encourage them to abandon food. In that sense solving the obesity crisis is much more complex than attempting to get people to quit smoking or never start.

More laws, regulations, and punitive action against food and food companies simply will not work. What can work: educating people about their caloric needs, and the calorie counts in the foods they eat -- and getting them to commit to an exercise program to burn some of those calories. This WHO official blames the obesity epidemic squarely on food companies and says the solution is to go after the food companies and make them change their ways so we won't be fat. This is just another example of the adage "for every complex problem there is a simple solution, and it never works." Dr. Kava notes that "A basic flaw with the official's suggestion is that he focuses only on the calorie consumption part of the energy balance equation -- this is certainly not the whole picture."

It is of interest to note that this story from Reuters, "Tackle Obesity Like Smoking," (http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080514/hl_nm/obesity_epidemic_dc;_ylt=AoNiG...) makes the same mistake we have seen in dozens of news stories about obesity: it praises efforts in New York City to combat obesity, citing specifically the city's ban on trans fats. As Morning Dispatch readers well know, replacing trans fats with another type of fat does nothing to reduce caloric intake. A fat is a fat is a fat -- all with nine calories per gram.

Celebs and their causes
Jeff Stier, who is visiting donors in California -- the land of celebrities -- called in to point out that retired Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor recently testified before Congress, calling for more funding for Alzheimer's disease research, while almost simultaneously, actor and new father Dennis Quaid testified against federal preemption for lawsuits against drug companies. Both of these well-known people based their well-attended and well-covered testimony on...what, exactly? Personal experiences. Their education and qualifications to speak on the areas upon which they testified is nil -- but thanks to their media clout, they got to tell the Congress their opinions, and the stories ran front-page everywhere. Jeff has written on this subject several times before -- but the same old story seems to repeat itself: celebs get the time and attention (and often the financing)
they desire based solely upon their ability to attract crowds.

Congrats to ACSH Trustee

DISPATCH: Fat, Shingles, and Statins

Jeff Stier on Dennis Prager Show
In case you missed ACSH's Jeff Stier on Dennis Prager's show yesterday, you can check it out here([http://dennisprager.townhall.com/talkradio/Show.aspx?RadioShowID=3](http://dennisprager.townhall.com/talkradio/Show.aspx?RadioShowID=3)). Jeff's segment is 12 minutes into the 30-minute show. Dennis asked people to support ACSH, because he believes in what we are doing. Of course, we couldn't keep doing what we do best without the support of people like those already reading MD, so we thank you.

Portion distortion
You may be well aware of America's ever-expanding waistlines, but did you know that portion sizes have been growing since the 70s? We came across an article comparing portion sizes of typical food items today to the portion sizes served twenty years ago. ACSH's Dr. Whelan notes, "It was quite surprising to see these typical food items side by side. You could really see how much more we are getting today. I think one of the main issues today is that you have more opportunities to get your food supersized." ACSH's Dr. Ross adds, "I remember going to the movies when the popcorns were really that [small](http://www.divinecaroline.com/article/22178/49492-portion-size--now), but now when I ask for a small popcorn at the movies, I can barely hold the tub with two hands."

People seem to want to always get more for their money -- not realizing that such a choice is not always a good idea for their diets. So they'll take that soda or fry upgrade for 25 cents. But you don't need to travel too far to see how some of the portion sizes are distorted in the U.S. In Canada, where I grew up, the bagels are still the same size as they were "twenty years ago," and I have never seen the equivalent of a Big Gulp at a convenience store.

The article author, Liz Monte, noted that in the 1970s, around 47% of Americans were overweight or obese; now 66% are. In addition, the number of just the obese people has doubled, from 15% of the population to 30%. While increased portion sizes haven't been the sole contributor to our obesity epidemic, large quantities of cheap food have distorted our perceptions of what a typical meal is supposed to look like.

Obesity and psychiatric disorders
Not only can being overweight or obese harm you physically, apparently it can take a toll on you mentally as well. A new study found that heavy adults also have higher rates of psychiatric disorders.([http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080515/hl_nm/obesity_psychiatric_dc;_ylt=Av...](http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080515/hl_nm/obesity_psychiatric_dc;_ylt=Av...))

Dr. Ross notes, "We also see people on certain medicines that have increased incidence of being overweight or obese too -- this is especially a problem with the newer anti-psychotics. Although
these drugs can miraculously help people with disabling schizophrenia, the trade-off can involve severe weight gain. Also, the relationship can sometimes go both ways. Are you obese because you're depressed, or depressed because you're obese?"

Using data from a national health survey of more than 40,000 Americans, researchers found that obese adults were up to twice as likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions as normal-weight adults.

Keep an eye out for the forthcoming ACSH book on _Obesity and Its Health Effects_.

Let them eat popcorn
Despite portion size worries, there's good news for popcorn lovers: People who snack on popcorn may consume more whole grains and less meat than their peers who don't, new research shows. Dr. Whelan says, "popcorn is a very tasty and filling snack, and you can eat a relatively large amount for few calories -- if you don't slather it in butter. Now that the FDA has approved the use of olestra on popcorn, it will be even less calories with the same great taste."

What we can take away from this story( http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080515/hl_nm/popcorn_grain_dc;_ylt=AtACpKOy... ) is that popcorn may be more than just your companion at the movie theater -- it can also offer a healthy alternative to high-energy-dense (meaning high in calories), low-nutrient-dense snacks.

CDC recommends shingles vaccination
The CDC is now recommending that everyone over the age of sixty get a vaccination against shingles( http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr57e0515a1.htm?s_cid=rr57e0515_e ). Dr. Whelan says, "It's great that the CDC is recommending it, but it is an expensive vaccine -- not to mention the fact that many adults don't think they need any more vaccinations, that it's just for children and babies." Dr. Ross adds, "I think this announcement will most likely persuade insurers to cover it. When there is a specific recommendation by the CDC, it usually trickles down. I agree that vaccination for older adults is a very neglected topic. Adults should get vaccines protective against tetanus, influenza, and pneumonia, and now shingles. While the others need to be given every ten years or so, the flu vaccine needs to be given every year."

Approximately 1 million new cases of zoster (shingles) occur in the United States annually. Approximately one in three persons in the general population will develop zoster during their lifetime. Shingles is caused by a varicella-zoster virus. It can cause debilitating pain that lasts months to years, and the pain can be difficult to treat. The shingles vaccine is still brand new and was approved in 2006. We are fortunate that it's available, and more people should be taking advantage of it.

Statins' benefits
High-doses of cholesterol-lowering statins may offer protection against cancer, according to a new study( http://www.reuters.com/articlePrint?articleId=USCOL56113120080515 ). Dr. Whelan notes, "I was a little disappointed that this report didn't say what type of cancer they are talking about. It is totally meaningless if you don't know which cancer(s) might be reduced by statins." Dr. Ross says, "While it is a nice a preliminary report, it's not exactly the most informative study. This information should be an inspiration for researchers to put together a real study, since we probably..."
have around a million people on statins in this country alone."

DISPATCH: Fat, Sugar, HIV, Cell Phones, and Music

Obesity rise in children equals bigger health risks
ACSH staffers are interested in the five-part series( http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2008/05/09/ST20080509... [79] ) that will appear in the _Washington Post_ all this week. The series addresses many aspects of childhood obesity. The first part describes the obesity epidemic compromising the lives of millions of American children. ACSH's Dr. Whelan notes, "We know about the consequences of adult obesity but never really talk about the effects of childhood obesity. This really concerns us, since we are talking about decreasing the overall lifespan."

Being overweight at a young age appears to be far more destructive to wellbeing than adding excess pounds later in life. Virtually every major organ is at risk. The greater damage is probably irreversible. With one in three children in this country overweight or obese and studies indicating that many will never overcome their overweight -- up to 80% of obese teens become obese adults -- it is hard to be optimistic. A huge public health crisis is looming.

One thing we are bound to see more and more are "solutions" that are highly unlikely to be effective remedies -- such as mandatory calorie posting on menu boards or writing children's Body Mass Index on their report cards. Now more than ever, we need to base our decisions on sound science, not nonsensical regulations.

Note: ACSH will soon be publishing a monograph detailing the health effects of obesity on the various organs and physiological functions of the body.

Sugar in the baby bottle? But it's organic.
Starting your precious baby on a sugary formula goes against the grain of what nutritionists and pediatricians recommend, and it seems all the more ironic that the people obsessed about their babies' health are the ones rushing to purchase it. These people are the so-called "yoga moms" that will unquestioningly buy almost anything that is labeled "organic" -- even though such products are often one-third to one-half times more expensive and no studies show any health benefit from "organic." The baby formula discussed in a front-page _New York Times_ article( http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/19/us/19formula.html?_r=1&partner=rssyahoo... [80] ) that attracted our attention is called Similac Organic, and it is significantly sweeter than other formulas. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava says, "One of the consequences of the whole organic fad is that people become so obsessed with the mentality that everything must be organic that they are willing to overlook other, perhaps more important, characteristics of foods. By putting cane sugar in the formula, you are exposing and maybe strengthening babies' preferences for sweet foods." Dr. Jatinder Bhatia, a member of the nutrition committee of the American Academy of Pediatrics, said, "The parents in my practice who would use organic formula are the same parents who would be worried about giving sweets to their babies."

Another cause for concern is that sucrose can harm tooth enamel faster than other sugars, and once babies get used to its sweeter taste, they might resist less-sweet formulas or solid foods. This is why parents are advised to introduce vegetables first to their baby and then slowly
introduce fruits. With childhood obesity on the rise, enhancing an affinity for sugar so early (because even newborns prefer sweet tastes) will not be beneficial to your baby.

HIV infection on the rise in teens
HIV infection among teens is on the rise in New York City( http://www.nydailynews.com/news/2008/05/18/2008-05-18_hiv_rate_rise_in_c... [81] ). A new data analysis revealed that the number of young people ages thirteen to nineteen infected with the AIDS virus (HIV) rose 29% between 2004 and 2006. Dr. Whelan says, "I remember when we first started talking about AIDS in the 80s, and it was a huge public health crisis. Now it seems like no one is talking about it in the U.S. anymore." The story unfortunately did not give any real hints about how the teens were acquiring it -- whether it was by intravenous drugs or sexual intercourse.

In 2004, there were 130 new infections among teens. That jumped to 168 new cases two years later. ACSH's Dr. Ross notes, "As bad as it sounds, it really is a tiny absolute number overall." Dr. Whelan responds, "True, but one could argue that there should be no new cases of AIDS, especially since we know how it's transmitted."

According to the _Daily News_, Department of Health representative Anthony Weiner noted, "There is a false notion that HIV has now been managed and controlled...We need to stop treating this like yesterday's problem and [instead] like a challenge we need to face today."

Cell phones and behavioral problems
According to a study by UCLA researchers( http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,356551,00.html [82] ), pregnant women who regularly use mobile phones are more likely to have children with behavioral problems. Dr. Whelan shook her head in disbelief this morning. "Every day, we read about these studies that are based on associations and they tell us absolutely nothing useful. Why can't the media find something more important to write about?" Dr. Ross notes, "Well, at least they admitted there could be a confounder, when they pointed out other possible explanations for the rise in behavioral problems, such as: mothers who were frequently on the phone through pregnancy might continue the pattern after birth and spend less time with their babies. But overall, it provided no useful information."

UCLA professor Leeka Kheifets, who had previously been skeptical of reports linking mobile phone use to behavior disorders in children, concluded with her three co-authors that there did appear to be an association between mobile phone exposure and behavioral problems. However, they said, radiation may not be the cause.

Music good for the blood pressure?
Listening to half an hour of music each day may significantly lower your blood pressure( http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080516/hl_nm/listening_music_dc;_ylt=AlO0aq... [83] ). Dr. Whelan notes, "Sure, there is no harm in listening to music everyday, but listening to music should complement your medical therapy and not replace it. I really hope that people don't interpret this as an option to skip taking their hypertension medication."

In the study, researchers found that people with mild hypertension (high blood pressure) who listened to classical, Celtic, or Indian (raga) music for just thirty minutes a day for one month had significant reductions in their blood pressure. Dr. Ross wonders, "What happens when they listen
to 50 Cent?"

Of Organics and Organs, Viruses and Radiation
By Krystal Ford

Quote of the Day
"If the organic community wants consumers to embrace their products, they need to be affordable, not a self-proclaimed panacea to the ills of a modern, indulgent society." --Julie Gilbert, a Brisbane dietitian, in the _Courier Mail_.

Aussies confront organic myth
We were happy to see an Australian nutritionist challenge the argument that organic food is more nutritious( http://www.news.com.au/couriermail/story/0,23739,23723697-27197,00.html [84] ). ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava never bought into the organic movement and has noted in the past that "There really is no good evidence that organically-produced food is any more nutritious than its conventional counterpart."( http://www.acsh.org/factsfears/newsID.762/news_detail.asp [85] )

The Australian nutritionist said, "Those who have adopted the organic way of eating believe the benefits it brings to their health and the environment are worth the cost. But does this benefit really exist or are we merely the victims of trendiness?" Instead of relying on organic food -- which is more costly than conventionally-grown food -- as a "magic pill" to ensure a life free of illness, try exercising, cutting down on portion sizes, and decreasing saturated fat intake. These are solutions known to improve your health and they won't cost you a fortune.

Sally Satel calls for more kidneys
Today, we had a special guest with us during our morning meeting, Dr. Sally Satel. Dr. Satel, a psychiatrist and resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is also an ACSH Advisor. We discussed her recent op-ed in the _Wall Street Journal_ (http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121089708343197205.html?mod=todays_us_op... [86]) on an important issue: creating a legal market for organ donation. She notes, "there is a significant organ shortage, more specifically kidney shortage. We need to give people more incentive to donate a kidney. However, monetary compensation would never fly politically. Other ideas that have been discussed are third-party payers like Medicare, and such a transaction would have to be enacted through government regulation. Compensation could come in the form of a tax credit, going towards retirement or health care insurance." Dr. Whelan asks, "If, for instance, a family member or friend wants to donate a kidney, can they be legally compensated for such a gift?" Sally responds, "You can compensate them for hotel and travel and time missed from work, but that's it...Because of the global organ shortage, thousands of patients die unnecessarily each year for want of a kidney."

We should note that Dr. Satel, a victim of kidney disease that attacked her for no known reason a few years ago, was the recipient herself of a kidney, given generously and unselfishly by Virginia Postrel in March 2006.

Fighting a virus carrier
A letter by ACSH's Dr. Gil Ross appears in the _New York Times_ today( http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/health/20lett-FIGHTINGAVIR_LETTERS.htm... [87]),
responding to a column about mosquitoes and dengue fever. Dr. Ross wrote, "Today's Personal Health column rendered sage advice about avoiding mosquito exposure. I was disappointed, though, with the blithe dismissal of DDT...Since DDT 'fell out of favor' forty years ago, millions of impoverished Africans and Asians have died needlessly."

The benefits of using DDT to prevent deaths from malaria -- and the needless suffering and death that emanated from its precautionary ban in 1972 -- have long been favorite topics of ACSH's( http://www.acsh.org/news/newsID.318/news_detail.asp [88] ). Dr. Ross noted back in 2002 that "I continue to be astounded that so many millions of lives have been sacrificed to an environmentalist political agenda, with no trace of scientific support for human harm from DDT in its regulated and approved uses."

Radiation for prostate cancer might cause cancers
When we read the article in the _Washington Post_ ( http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/19/AR200805... [89] ) this morning about the increased risk for lung, bladder, and rectal cancer among patients treated with external beam radiation for prostate cancer, we were more than a little concerned. Dr. Whelan notes, "This is a sobering study. Men are encouraged to get PSA tests to detect prostate cancer, but the downside is that the PSA test is far from perfect -- indeed, there are many false positives, causing needless anxiety and surgeries." Dr. Ross adds, "this study should encourage a better look at pathology before turning to beam radiation for treatment. If an elevated PSA reading is a false positive, the last thing you want to do is anything that may cause cancer."

HRT confusion
We have known for a while that hormone replacement therapy (HRT) taken at a younger age -- peri-menopause, the early menopausal stage -- could be beneficial if used for a few years. But this news is hard to communicate to the public, since the results of a large federal study in 2002 (the WHI) caused such alarm about breast cancer and heart disease risk from HRT. However, today we came across an article( http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080520/hl_nm/heart_hormone_dc [90] ) that said women entering menopause should not worry about HRT -- despite a highly publicized study that put off many women from the drug. Dr. Ross says, "the big study that has been drawing all the negative attention on HRT was focused on long-term use -- a decade or more at times -- by older menopausal women. But HRT taken to relieve menopausal symptoms is usually beneficial for younger menopausal women and often has no adverse impact on breast cancer or heart disease, if taken for only a few years."

DISPATCH: Celebrity, Senescence, Prematurity, Anxiety, and Fat

Quote of the day
"Whether it's pancreatic cancer or brain cancer, it's a reminder of our own mortality and their mortality...When disease comes calling, we're all really the same, whether you're famous or not." -- Dr. Barron H. Lerner, a historian and professor of medicine and public health at Columbia University Medical Center, _New York Times_, May 20, 2008, speaking of the recent diagnosis of inoperable brain cancer of Sen. Ted Kennedy.

Celebrity illness
When a celebrity falls ill (http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/senator-kennedys-diagnosis-ratt...[91]), it may remind us of our own vulnerability. But at the same time it brings so much attention to a disease. What Patrick Swayze did for pancreatic cancer, Ted Kennedy will probably do for malignant brain tumors. We here at ACSH feel for Ted Kennedy and his family. The prognosis for long-term survival is grim, due to the sensitive location of the tumor, making surgery out of the question. Many people feel that they personally know Ted Kennedy, because he has been a public figure for so long. When people close to you are ill, you often ask yourself what you would do in their position? We would enjoy what time we had left.

Senescence is not a bad thing
We read this story and saw only good news, but we were amused at how it was presented as bad news (http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080520/hl_nm/un_chronic_dc;_ylt=AgRE5rTbILj...[92]). Chronic conditions such as heart disease and stroke have become the chief causes of death globally, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). ACSH's Dr. Ross says, "People are no longer dying of pneumonia at a young age but are living to older ages when heart disease becomes an issue. This means that medical care is getting better, and life expectancy is increasing, and the result is diseases of old age." We cannot escape aging or a finite lifespan. ACSH's Jeff Stier jokingly asks, "What interventions should we use to change this?"

The U.N. agency predicted, "The shift from infectious diseases including tuberculosis, HIV/AIDS, and malaria -- traditionally the biggest killers -- to non-communicable diseases is set to continue to 2030." Dr. Ross notes, "At least the researcher mentioned that cigarette smoking is the biggest modifiable risk factor." This is just another example of the media transforming a good news story into a bad news one.

Premature babies at greater risk for birth defects
We think that it is a medical miracle that so many premature infants are able to survive now. Unfortunately, premature babies are more than twice as likely to have a major birth defect as full-term infants, with the risk even higher among very pre-term babies (http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080521/hl_nm/birth_defects_usa_dc[93]). ACSH's Dr. Whelan says, "We need to focus on preventing premature births in the first place. We must pay attention to important risk factors for premature birth such as smoking during pregnancy and maternal obesity."

About 8% of babies born prematurely had a birth defect, compared to roughly 3% of full-term births, according to researchers. Babies born between twenty-four and thirty-one weeks' gestation were at the highest risk for birth defects -- about five times more than full-term infants.

Ground Zero anxiety
We read today about yet another 9/11 health effects study that is based on junk science (http://www.nysun.com/new-york/ground-zero-responders-found-to-have-eleva...[94]). It's a very emotional subject, but that doesn't mean we should lower scientific standards. Mount Sinai conducted the study and found that roughly one in ten rescue and recovery workers who toiled at the site of the destroyed World Trade Center in 2001 and 2002 reported disturbing flashbacks and recurring nightmares -- comparable to posttraumatic stress disorders found in soldiers. The problem is that the study is based on one interview apiece and self-reported symptoms provided by workers when they filled out a questionnaire during the study period, which began ten months
after the Twin Towers collapsed and continued for five years. Jeff Stier says (http://www.nysun.com/opinion/mystery-of-lung-disease/48940/), "many of the people who fill out the questionnaire are going to be the ones who aren't feeling well, but what about everyone that hasn't been affected -- and therefore couldn't be bothered to fill it out? This skews the study towards more health effects, and nobody counters them. However, raising questions like this doesn't win political points with anyone, so shoddy science gets a free ride."

Good fat, bad fat
At ACSH we don’t like to blatantly categorize fats as good or bad. There are different categories of both saturated and trans fats, with respect to their effects on health. A recent article (http://www.latimes.com/news/custom/scimedemail/la-he-eat19-2008may19,0,5...[96]) debunks the idea that all trans fats are bad for our hearts and worse than saturated animal fats. Apparently, some trans fats, ones that exist naturally, may be good for you -- or at least for rats that were fed vaccenic acid, a naturally occurring trans fat found in milk and dairy products. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava notes, "Even if milk and yogurt contained a good 'trans fat,' most likely if you had cardiovascular disease you would be on a low-fat diet and wouldn't be getting much fat anyway. The point is that it is not accurate to broadly categorize fats as being good or bad -- rather, a moderate intake is what matters the most."

DISPATCH: Cows, Cars, Stairs, Exhaust, and Drownings

USDA tries to boost image of cattle industry
We were skeptical about the cattle industry’s attempt to clean up its image. Agriculture Secretary Ed Schafer yesterday announced (http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/content/other/bse/news/may2108downers.html) plans to close a regulatory loophole that permits some disabled cattle to be used for food. ACSH's Jeff Stier notes, "People mistakenly assume all downer cows have mad cow disease, which is simply not true." ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava adds, "I think it is just a public relations move. There are different reasons a cow could be a downer. It could have just broken its leg. That doesn't mean the cow had mad cow disease." Stier asks, "How many cases of mad cow have there been in U.S.? Maybe one -- and that one came from foreign beef. This is just the precautionary principle at work again."

Young and restless also seat belt-less
We are disappointed that many teens are failing to buckle up when they get in a car. Sixty-eight percent of drivers and passengers between the ages of sixteen and twenty who were killed in car crashes at night in 2006 were unbuckled, said the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (http://ap.google.com/article/ALeqM5jtRD-aliCyM7zsRaxigMentKSq_QD90P0VG0). ACSH's Dr. Whelan responds, "This is phenomenal. These teens are dying unnecessarily because of something simple such as not wearing a seat belt. We have the technology to prevent these deaths. We must do a better job of educating teens about the risks of this reckless behavior." Parents must forcefully insist that their young drivers reflexively buckle up as soon as they get in the car.

Step in the right direction
We are constantly bombarded with absurd "public health" initiatives such as banning trans fats or calorie posting on menu boards, so we were glad to read about a new American Cancer Society
(ACS) initiative. The ACS launched a ten-week challenge to help people get active, stay active, and have fun doing it. The Get Active Challenge program allows users to create individualized plans, track their progress, and get friends, family, and neighbors involved. Colleen Doyle, director of nutrition and physical activity at ACS, said "up to half of cancer deaths can be prevented by eating right, staying at a healthy weight, being active, quitting smoking, and getting the appropriate screening tests."(
http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080521/hl_nm/cancer_society_dc;_ylt=AsAwOgS... [99 ]
)

At the same time, New York's Health Commissioner is urging us to take the stairs because, to put it frankly, "we are getting fat." The city is introducing a green logo of a person taking the stairs with the mantra "Burn Calories, Not Electricity. Take the Stairs." ACSH's Todd Seavey says, "I wonder if this has anything to do with subway escalators constantly malfunctioning."(
http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/05/20/these-stairs-were-made-for-... [100 ]
)

Henry Miller on diesel particulates
Dr. Henry I. Miller -- the recent recipient of ACSH's public health award -- is back at the keyboard again. This time, he wrote about diesel exhaust risks -- and the measures taken to reduce them -- being exaggerated( http://www.ocregister.com/articles/california-diesel-health-2047459-exha... [101 ] ). California Air Resources Board (CARB) has begun to implement a program to reduce the diesel exhaust emissions from freight movement along California's trade corridors, including its seaports. This is because diesel exhaust supposedly causes respiratory diseases and 2,400 premature deaths per year. (Fine particulate matter is very small soot that diffuses deep into the lungs.)

Dr. Miller asks, "How solid is the evidence that diesel exhaust particulate matter is a significant threat to the health of Californians?...A large and detailed 2005 epidemiological study from UCLA found no association between fine particulate matter and mortality in elderly Californians during 1983-2002. Likewise, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's voluminous 2002 report _Health Assessment Document for Diesel Engine Exhaust_ did not conclude that diesel exhaust causes premature deaths. Moreover, current levels of particulate matter in California's air are the lowest ever recorded."

The new regulations that CARB wishes to impose will significantly impact the economy, at a time where the economy is already suffering. Furthermore, the state's resources would be expended for a regulation that will not benefit public health. ACSH Trustee Dr. James Enstrom, a professor at UCLA, said, "I think it is a classic example of how misrepresentation of science can have adverse consequences, particularly for the California economy." Dr. Miller noted, "CARB should reassess the overall health effects of diesel exhaust in California and the relationship between fine particles and mortality. If CARB does not change course, billions of pollution-reducing dollars will, in effect, vanish into thin air." This will obviously benefit no one.

Child drownings raise pool safety concerns
We were startled to read today that there is an increase in the average number of drowning deaths in pools and spas among children under the age of five( http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121141083022412295.html [102 ] ). Even though the increase was relatively small, from 267 for 2002-2004 to 283 for 2003-2005, it's still troubling because these are deaths that can be prevented. Dr. Kava says, "This means that somebody is not watching their
kids." ACSH's Dr. Ross adds, "People set up these cheap inflatable pools without any fences, but it is still a pool, and you need to take the same precautions." (http://riskometer.org/ [103]) Dr. Whelan notes, "You have to watch out for hot tubs too."

**DISPATCH: McCarthy, McCain, Menopause, Muscle Spasms, and Memorial Day**

**ACSH responds to McCarthy**

When we read Dr. Claire McCarthy's letter yesterday (http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.jsp?articleId=281474977349569 [104]), we were flabbergasted. Here we have a highly intelligent and credible person who is a senior medical editor for Harvard Health Publications speaking out against phthalates and bisphenol A and encouraging people to seek alternatives to plastic, such as glass bottles and toys made of wood, cloth, or metal.

Dr. McCarthy wrote, "Carcinogens are carcinogens; while a large exposure is bad, no exposure can be guaranteed to be truly safe. The same goes for any chemical in food or the environment that has been shown to cause harm. Less is better; with less you may be fine. But less is never better than none." ACSH's Dr. Whelan responded, refuting McCarthy's statement: "There is a vast difference between the designation of a chemical as a 'carcinogen' based on animal laboratory tests and the classification 'carcinogen' based on human epidemiology. For example, innumerable natural and manmade chemicals cause cancer in rodents—but the bona fide human cancer risks have been identified through human studies. Among the better-known examples, cigarette smoking and long-term, intense exposure to sunlight and radiation have proven human carcinogenic effects, as you well know. Exposure to saccharin, traces of dioxin, nitrite, cyclamates—and other "carcinogens du jour" as determined by animal studies—pose no known human cancer risk. In short, a 'carcinogen is not a carcinogen'."

Dr. McCarthy plays into the precautionary principle favored by doting parents by saying, "So what should parents do while we wait for scientists to sort this out? There's no clear answer—for now, every family is going to have to figure out how they want to play the odds."

Dr. Whelan's response to this is, "I fear that you may have misled your readers, causing them needless anxiety about purely hypothetical risks. How many parents, as a result of your article, will misprioritize preventive health measures for their children—worrying about plastic bottles and rubber duckies while neglecting really important measures, such as making sure their children use seatbelts, wear protective helmets while biking or rollerblading, and have working smoke detectors—along with other proven ways to reduce the risk of disease and death?"

We are very interested to see how Dr. Whelan's letter will be received. Sometimes we feel like the Lone Ranger, entrusted to protect the vast lands of science and reason.
Sen. John McCain releases health records
We applaud the release John McCain's health records( http://www.latimes.com/news/politics/la-na-medical23-2008may23,0,4489839... ). ACSH also calls for Obama to do the same. Too many people fail to understand the irreversible effects of smoking. ACSH's Jeff Stier wrote a scientifically accurate but controversial Huffington Post blog entry( http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-stier/obamas-health_b_97436.html ) about this over a month ago. The issue may be back in the news in light of the release of McCain's files.

Our point remains: If health is an issue in the campaign -- and given the coverage of McCain's health records, it clearly is -- this is an opportunity to educate the public, especially young people, about the fact that twenty-six years of smoking (which is likely Obama's history -- probably more than 50,000 cigarettes) can have serious long-term consequences. So many young people see Obama as a role model -- appropriately so, regardless of one's politics. Jeff Stier therefore says, "We've had many conversations at this breakfast table about celebrities and _diseases_. Shouldn't celebrities and the _single most preventable risk factor_ for diseases be fair game too?"

Hormone therapy
We were disappointed to read that menopausal women who take hormone-replacement therapy pills more than double their risk of developing potentially fatal blood clots. Dr. Whelan's recommendation: "Menopausal women must discuss this with their doctor to evaluate the risks versus the benefits." Dr. Kava adds, "It will probably boil down to how severe their symptoms are and how miserable menopause is making their lives. For some, a slight elevated risk for blood clots is well worth it."

David Sturdee, president of the International Menopause Society, said, "Although this relative risk is raised in hormone users when compared to non-users, the absolute risk is indeed very small, as blood clots do not often occur in this age group in healthy women on no treatment. This very slightly increased risk of a blood clot should not discourage healthy women from using HRT if it is needed."( http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080522/hl_nm/hormones_clots_dc;_ylt=AvGD.us... )

Chantix
We are in disbelief over how much negative publicity the anti-smoking drug Chantix has been getting. First pilots( http://www.usatoday.com/news/health/2008-05-21-chantix-smoking_N.htm?csp=34 ) are warned not to use it and now truck drivers. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration issued a warning Thursday on Chantix, advising medical examiners "to not qualify anyone currently using this medication for commercial motor vehicle licenses."( http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121149231399615503.html?mod=googlenews_wsj )

Dr. Whelan says, "This drug is being singled out because of a study that reported side effects such as loss of consciousness, lapses in alertness, dizziness, and muscle spasms. But many other drugs also have these side effects. So why so much negative publicity about this?" Dr. Ruth Kava notes, "It could discourage people from trying Chantix and that is a real shame. Because it could help people quit a life-threatening product."

Summer tips
The ACSH staff wish you a happy and safe Memorial Day weekend( http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080521/... ). Since you will
probably be outside enjoying the long weekend, now would be a good time to read our updated Health and Safety Tips for Your Summer Vacation.

Dr. Elizabeth Whelan says(http://www.healthnewsdigest.com/news/Health_Tips_620/Summer_Health_and_S... [111]), "Our goal is not to dissuade anyone from participating in summer activities. We simply want people to safeguard their fun by taking appropriate precautions."

DISPATCH: ACSH Has Death for Breakfast

This morning, it seems we have the perfect breakfast trio of news stories: cereal disease, coffee and disease, and wi-fi disease. But before you put down your cup of coffee, turn off your computer, and push away your cereal bowl, let us put your mind at ease with ACSH-style debunking of pseudoscience.

Wi-fi allergies alleged
We came across quite a ridiculous story today(http://kob.com/article/stories/S451152.shtml?cat=517 [112]): A group in Sante Fe claims that they are allergic to the wireless Internet signal. Now they want wi-fi banned from public buildings. Dr. Whelan says, "The story is the ultimate absurdity." ACSH's Todd Seavey adds, "They could be borderline schizophrenic."

Arthur Firstenberg -- a member of this electro-sensitive group -- says he is highly sensitive to certain types of electric fields, including wireless Internet and cell phones. The group claims that putting up wi-fi in public places is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Not to be insensitive, but the best solution might be to live in the desert, because wireless Internet is everywhere and it won't be going away anytime soon (it may even be coming to the deserts).

Coffee, tea do not cause breast cancer
When we read this article( http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20080526/hl_nm/coffee_tea_dc [113]) we were surprised that anyone ever thought coffee or tea could cause breast cancer in the first place. But now, we can really breathe a sigh of relief. Dr. Davaasambuu Ganmaa of the Harvard School of Public Health and colleagues found -- after a decade-long study -- that women may actually be able to drink coffee or tea without fear that doing so will increase their risk for breast cancer.

Researchers also found no apparent association between the occurrence of breast cancer and intake of other caffeinated soft drinks or chocolate, which contribute to overall caffeine intake.
Dr. Borlaug is quoted, but it's not the whole picture. We read an article today in the _Wall Street Journal_ (http://online.wsj.com/article/SB121185245470521741.html) that paints a more pessimistic picture of the prospect of a wheat-rust epidemic than did Dr. Norman Borlaug himself when he was at our breakfast meeting two years ago. (As many of our readers know, Dr. Borlaug is the “Father of the Green Revolution”(http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/26/opinion/26borlaug.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=N... of the 1950s and 60s, increasing crop yields in Latin America and Asia, for which he won 1970s’ Nobel Peace Prize). Dr. Borlaug is a longtime ACSH Trustee.

In the WSJ article, Dr. Borlaug is quoted saying, “This new strain of rust has the big potential to destroy right now the major commercial wheat varieties, especially in the irrigated areas where there's high use of fertilizer, be it organic or inorganic.” While this surely highlights the problem, when we met with him at ACSH’s breakfast table over a year ago, he also offered solutions such as genetic engineering -- which went unmentioned in today’s article. Such genetic manipulation (gene-splicing) would involve transferring the gene for rust-resistance from grains such as rice to vulnerable wheat varieties, to protect wheat crops from this lethal fungal epidemic.

The author notes, "The potential for crop loss in Africa, the Middle East, and south Asia is higher. Based on wind patterns and the rate of spread, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization says countries in the immediate path of Ug99 grow 25% of global production." Fortunately, we have someone like Dr. Borlaug who does not just give in to problems but actively tries to find solutions. He said in the _New York Times_ piece "a global crop failure of this magnitude can be avoided. Before it is too late, America must rebuild, not destroy, the collaborative systems of international agricultural research that were so effective in starting the Green Revolution."

Reducing infections in hospitals
ACSH Trustee Betsy McCaughey had a letter( http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/26/opinion/l26hospital.html?scp=2&sq=mrsa...) in the _New York Times_ yesterday about reducing deadly infections. ACSH's Dr. Ross notes, "I especially liked Betsy’s take on the reverse risk scenario -- docs et al taking resistant bugs home and into the community with them on their lab coats and uniforms." Dr.McCaughey pointed to some easy steps that can be taken to reduce infections, such as following checklists to ensure proper hand washing and sterile procedures, and rigorous cleaning of rooms and equipment.

Dr. McCaughey wrote, "As long as surfaces in hospitals are contaminated with drug-resistant bacteria, doctors' and nurses' hands become recontaminated seconds after washing and gloving, as soon as they pull open a privacy curtain to see the next patient or touch a bedrail."

Having previously worked in the food industry, I am amazed at what hospitals can get away with. Employees in kitchens, by contrast, could not wear any jewelry or wear their uniforms outside, had to wash their hands constantly, and had very detailed cleaning and sanitization programs, plus piles of paperwork to fill out. Although kitchens and hospitals are very different, they do share the common goal of trying to reduce microbial growth and thus reduce infections.

_ Krystal Ford is a research intern at the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH.org, HealthFactsAndFears.com) _