

Dispatch: Haiti, Tougher HIV, E-Cigs, Magic H1N1 Wand

By ACSH Staff — January 15, 2010

Pharmaguy To the Rescue

[According to the New York Times](#) [1], “In the aftermath of the earthquake in Haiti, many Americans are reaching for their cellphones to make a donation via text message. And plenty of them are then spreading the word to others on sites like Twitter and Facebook.”

These technologies facilitated an unprecedented speed of contribution to the disaster relief effort, but that's not the only message being spread. “The aid effort is a topic that's trending on Twitter right now,” says ACSH's Jeff Stier. “One user named 'pharmaguy' tweeted, 'What if the top 10 pharma companies donated 5% of its worldwide one-day sales to Haiti relief? How much would that be?’

“Everyone wants to help however they can, but the notion that somehow pharmaceutical companies have that responsibility to give up a slice of their revenue is ridiculous. Why should they be singled out?”

There will be no Morning Dispatch on Monday in observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, but you can continue to follow Jeff on Twitter all weekend at <http://twitter.com/JeffACSH> [2].

Cases in Point

A new study by researchers at UCSF and UCLA suggests that [drug-resistant strains of HIV could become more prevalent in San Francisco](#) [3] in the next few years. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reports, “[T]he study's authors and public health officers agree that it's critical that new drug therapies continue to be developed as resistance to older treatments grows.”

In more encouraging news, HealthDay reports, “The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) announced Wednesday that it's partnering with Johnson & Johnson's insulin pump division, Animas Corp., to begin development of [the first artificial pancreas system](#) [4]. The goal is to have a prototype ready for regulatory review in about four years.”

“The pharmaceutical companies in this country are the main engine of lifesaving drugs and devices, and they're being oppressed by various calls for reduced prices, drug importation, etc.,” says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. “Our pharmaceutical industry has really shrunk dramatically already if you look at the number of new drugs introduced recently. If you want sophisticated drugs to fight constantly mutating pathogens or new technologies to combat diabetes, you have to have a strong pharmaceutical industry. They can only accomplish these things through the incentive of being allowed to invest in research and then reap the benefits of these investments without being targeted as the main source of charitable contributions whenever there's a natural disaster.”

Good Loopholes in a Bad Law

ACSH Advisor Michael Siegel writes on his [Tobacco Analysis blog](#) [5], “The United States District Court for the District of Columbia today [ruled](#) [6] that most likely the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not have the authority to regulate electronic cigarettes as drug-device combinations under the U.S. Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act and may instead regulate these products as 'recreational' tobacco products under the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act.”

“They decided that e-cigarettes are a tobacco product since the nicotine in them is derived from tobacco, just like the nicotine in gums and patches,” says Stier. “It's a weak argument, but interestingly, that's the saving grace here. This decision will not permit e-cigarette marketers to say their product is less harmful than smoking, but it also means that the FDA can't ban e-cigarettes, just like they can't ban regular cigarettes. To me, it just illustrates how ridiculous this law is. It just so happens that tobacco is the most efficient source of nicotine, so anything with nicotine derived from tobacco is a 'tobacco product,' but you can also get nicotine from a potato. Would it be any better in the FDA's distorted worldview if it came from a potato?”

Plus-Sized Paeans

[ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan wrote a letter to New York Post contributor Kyle Smith](#) [7] to thank him for his frank criticism of magazines' occasional, [ironic glorification of plus-sized models](#) [8].

“I didn't write it as letter to the editor, just to Kyle, but I guess they felt it should be published as one of the only voices of agreement,” says Dr. Whelan. “The whole thrust of his article is that showing oversized models and saying they're beautiful may do some good for the self-esteem of obese people, but it doesn't do any good for public health.”

If You Like This, We Have Some Real Estate for You

Hammacher Schlemmer is offering the [“H1N1 Destroying UV Wand”](#) [9] for the low, low price of \$69.95 (+ \$6.95 for gift-wrapping!) to help you lightly irradiate all of your favorite fomites.

“This is a great gift for the gullible,” says Dr. Whelan. “We recommend you get the vaccine instead.”

Curtis Porter is a research intern at the American Council on Science and Health ([ACSH.org](#) [10]).

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Links

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/15/technology/15mobile.html>

[2] <http://twitter.com/JeffACSH>

[3] <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/01/14/MN5H1BHUSM.DTL>

[4]

http://news.yahoo.com/s/hsn/20100114/hl_hsn/artificialpancreasprototypeindevelopmentfortype1diabetics;_ylt=AuhSaJ

[5] <http://tobaccoanalysis.blogspot.com/2010/01/united-states-district-court-rules-that.html>

[6] https://ecf.dcd.uscourts.gov/cgi-bin/show_public_doc?2009cv0771-54

[7]

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/letters/beauty_in_the_eye_of_the_beanpole_CgyEeaFbtcBx6ZMzwJVXcL

[8]

http://www.nypost.com/p/news/opinion/opedcolumnists/plus_size_models_are_better_role_vAk1fyrBtuapjzdrwxbRuM

[9]

http://www.hammacher.com/Product/78326?source=EML00410&cm_ven=WC&cm_cat=20100114_EML004

[10] <https://www.acsh.org/././..>