

Dispatch: Whelan Testimony, Lung Cancer Survival, Kids and Cholesterol

By ACSH Staff — January 25, 2010

Dr. Whelan Among the Senators

ACSH's Dr. Elizabeth Whelan reports on her testimony on Friday in front of a New York State Senate health committee about proposed soda taxes, among other health topics: "The Senators seemed rather stunned by my testimony. While I was talking, everyone was quiet and the things I was saying were so counter to every other opinion expressed that no one knew what was going on.

"One woman interrupted when I was talking about how orange juice has a high sugar content just like soda, since this was a discussion about calories not nutrients, and she said soda has no redeeming value. These people act as if eating is a strictly biological experience, like you pick which nutrients you need and precisely measure them out and gulp it down. So I mentioned that eating can also be a joy of life and an aesthetic experience. It was amazing that no one else there thought about it like that."

"Maybe it is that lack of connection to reality that is part of the problem," says ACSH's Jeff Stier. "These people make laws that affect all of us, yet they have no connection to reality."

Quit Smoking Either Way

BMJ (formerly *The British Medical Journal*) published a meta-analysis of ten studies that claims that smokers who quit after being diagnosed with early-stage lung cancer [double their chances of surviving for five years](#) [1].

"I doubt the validity of this study," says ACSH's Dr. Gilbert Ross. "Besides the fact that these survival rates are staggeringly high, it's really hard to believe that quitting could raise the five-year survival rate to 65%. We haven't analyzed the science of it since we don't know the details, so we can't condemn the study outright, but these numbers seem unlikely."

The Associated Press reports, "The message is you should never give up on giving up (smoking)," said Amanda Parsons, of the U.K. Centre for Tobacco Control Studies at the University of Birmingham, who led the study."

"I can't argue with that," says Dr. Whelan. "I just wish that these numbers were accurate, but they seem outlandishly optimistic."

"Yet when studies like this lead to such positive health messaging, rarely is the studying methodology challenged," says Stier. "As long as it gives us justification for saying something positive, most people don't care if a study is scientifically sound. But in cases where the science is overstated, and we give it a free ride since, 'Hey, it is good advice,' we wind up paying later. The truth will eventually come out and the underlying positive messages will be undercut. Still, it's true that smokers should give up smoking, even if the information is not accurate."

Kids These Days, with Their Abnormal Lipid Levels

The CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* last week revealed that [one in five American adolescents has abnormal lipid levels](#) [2], including one or more of: high LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, or elevated triglycerides.

According to Medpage Today, “An unsigned commentary by *_MMWR_*'s editors noted that 'untreated abnormal lipid levels in childhood and adolescence are linked to increased risk for cardiovascular disease in adulthood,' but they stopped short of endorsing routine lipid testing for adolescents.”

“This is interesting since we didn't know of any direct relationship between abnormal lipid levels and obesity,” says Dr. Whelan. “It's strange that we have not heard something about this before.”

“What are the recommendations based on this?” asks Stier. “Even if they did screen for these lipid levels, what would they do about it? It may be necessary to put young children on statins, but they haven't said that.”

“It seems logical that there should be a relationship between BMI and lipid levels, but I can't think of a single study that has shown that,” says Dr. Ross. “This is something that a scientific analysis should be able to determine easily. As for recommendations, youngsters who are obese should have lipid screening and be candidates for intensive weight-control programs and possibly lipid-lowering medication.”

Vitamin D Jour

[A study published in BMJ](#) [3] examined the association between circulating vitamin D concentration, dietary intake of vitamin D and calcium, and the risk of colorectal cancer in European populations.

“They found that the highest quintile for vitamin D concentration in the blood had forty percent lower risk for colorectal cancer than the lowest quintile,” says Dr. Ross. “However, dietary vitamin D had no relationship to cancer risk.”

“Vitamin D is in the news a lot these days for all kinds of reasons,” says Dr. Whelan. “It's the Vitamin D jour. The study authors did not make any specific recommendations for supplementing vitamin D, however.”

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