At the ongoing American College of Cardiology meeting, which is being held in Washington a place where the truth is generally in short supply there was an interesting talk which did the location justice.

The result: Anyone who takes headlines seriously will be afraid to even look at a bottle of diet soda, let alone drink from one.

We can thank both Dr. Ankur Vyas, and his group for publishing one of the latest quintessential examples of garbage science, and an all-too-willing press, as always looking for juicy headlines. Or can't be bothered to read the study. Or have their own agenda. Probably all three.

As usual, there is a strong correlation between junk studies and misleading headlines. Here are some examples:

Diet soda associated to women's heart risks: abc7chicago.com

Diet drink danger: Possible link to heart risk in older women, study says (CBS News)

Regular Consumption Of Diet Drinks Linked To Heart Problems In Older Women (Huffington Post)

Diet Soda Ups Your Heart Attack Risk? (Prevention.com)

There are MANY more. According to Google News, this story has been covered by 3,900 sources. ACSH's Dr. Josh Bloom points out a minor problem: Too bad all 3,900 are wrong.

Why? It's actually very easy to understand.

The Iowa group studied 60,000 middle-aged women over a ten-year period. Data were accumulated from questionnaires a notoriously unreliable method of data gathering. But this isn't a tiny fraction of the problem.
At the end of the study period they took a look at the health of women who did, and did not drink diet soda. Of women who drank two or more diet drinks per day, 8.5 percent had some sort of heart disease. But, for women who either drank fewer or no diet drinks that number was only 7 percent. Uh-oh. Smoking gun?

Dr. Bloom says, Not even close. Because buried at the bottom of the article is what is really going on: The women who drank more diet soda were less healthy to begin with. They were more likely to be overweight, to smoke, and to have high blood pressure than the other group.

He continues: So, let's correct the headline a bit: "Sick People are More Likely to Die." Accurate headline, but it won't sell many papers.

At least Dr. Vyas did admit "It's not an extreme risk." This did not make the headlines.

No the risk is not extreme. How about zero? Because there is absolutely nothing in this study that could lead anyone with even a passing knowledge of science or epidemiology to conclude that diet soda has a health risk whatsoever. Nothing.

What is really going on here is a classic case of mixing up cause and effect. No, diet soda doesn't give you heart disease. You already have more heart disease and drink diet soda to try to cut calorie consumption.

Playing basketball does not make you tall. Opening an umbrella does not make it rain. Going to sleep does not make the sun go down. Geese flying south do not cause winter.

Although this study borders on downright silly, the implications of this type of research and reporting are not. American people, not exactly known for their scientific acumen, read this stuff and it becomes fact. And we all get a little more confused every day. The result: the inability of the average person to make educated choices, since they are manipulated and/or confused by the vast amount of conflicting "evidence" that is flying around the internet.

Dr. Bloom concludes, The anti-aspartame and anti-soda loons must be jumping with joy over this. The study says NOTHING about the health effects of artificial sweeteners, but the headlines sure do. Guess who's going to win this one?