

Environmental Medicine Editorial by Walter Crinnion, ND

## pinch me, I must be dreaming the President's cancer panel says that environmental chemicals cause cancer and recommends that we go organic!

*In 1971, then President Richard Nixon declared a war on cancer and appointed a President's Cancer Panel. This three-person panel is required to submit an annual report to the President describing the status of the "war" and identifying both progress and barriers to continued advances. In May of this year, this panel (currently composed of only two members who were appointed by President George W. Bush: Dr. LaSalle Leffall Jr., an oncologist and professor of surgery at Howard University, and Dr. Margaret Kripke, an immunologist at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston) rocked the boat in a way that I wish I could.*

This year they changed the focus of the report to the role that environmental chemicals play in cancer. They apparently read and agreed with the published research showing that environmental carcinogens are responsible for causing some cancers. While there is still debate in some areas, the bulk of research clearly shows many cancers can be caused by increased chemical exposures or decreased ability to clear such chemicals from our bodies.

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In their report entitled, "Reducing Environmental Cancer Risk: What We Can Do Now," these physicians stated that "The Panel was particularly concerned to find that the true burden of

environmentally induced cancer has been grossly underestimated."

Their letter to President Obama goes on to state: "The Panel urges you most strongly to use the power of your office to remove the carcinogens and other toxins from our food, water, and air that needlessly increase health care costs, cripple our Nation's productivity, and devastate American lives."

The report then provides insightful recommendations for policy and research changes. These include, amazingly, that caution be used in relation to environmental chemicals. Until recently, chemicals had to be proven carcinogens before they were banned. The authors want the precautionary principle to be "the cornerstone of a new national cancer prevention strategy..."

The panel went on to recommend:

- ◆ Throwing out the old workplace standards for chemical exposure, saying, "Previous estimates of occupational cancer risks are outdated and should no longer be used by government or industry."
- ◆ That environmental and public health advocates should be included in developing the environmental cancer research and policy agendas and in information dissemination because "agencies

- responsible for promulgating and enforcing regulations related to environmental exposures are failing to carry out their responsibilities.”
- ◆ More research, including the impact of *in utero*, childhood, and multigenerational exposure. Current funding for federally supported occupational and environmental epidemiological cancer research is inadequate.
  - ◆ That science devise better methods to study the adverse effects of environmental chemicals, including looking at multiple exposures and long-term effects.
  - ◆ And finally, that “physicians and other medical personnel should routinely query patients about their previous and current workplace and home environments as part of the standard medical history. This information will increase the likelihood that environmental factors in cancer and other illnesses are considered and will strengthen the body of information on environmental exposures and disease. Data on workplace and home environmental history should be incorporated into existing and developing medical records systems.”
- ◆ Filter home tap or well water.
  - ◆ Store and carry water in stainless steel, glass or BPA- and phthalate-free containers.
  - ◆ Microwave food and beverages in ceramic or glass instead of plastic containers. This will reduce exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals that may leach into food when containers are heated.
  - ◆ When possible, choose food grown without pesticides or chemical fertilizers and wash conventionally grown produce to remove residues.
  - ◆ Exposure to antibiotics, growth hormones, and toxic run-off from livestock feed lots can be minimized by eating free-range meat.
  - ◆ Avoid or minimize consumption of processed, charred, and well-done meats to reduce exposure to carcinogenic heterocyclic amines and polyaromatic hydrocarbons.
  - ◆ Consult sources such as the Household Products Database to help make informed decisions.

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They also gave a list of recommendations for the average person to reduce cancer risk, including:

- ◆ Eat organic. They emphasize this “is vitally important” for children who “are far more susceptible to damage from environmental carcinogens and endocrine-disrupting compounds than adults.”
- ◆ “Choose foods, house and garden products, play spaces, toys, medicines, and medical tests that will minimize children’s exposure to toxics.”
- ◆ Be conscious of preconception and prenatal exposures and reduce them as much as possible.
- ◆ Remove shoes before entering the home.
- ◆ Wash work clothes separately from other family laundry.

It is a pleasure to discover that members of President’s Cancer Panel, under the auspices of the National Cancer Institute, are talking like they have read my book. Hopefully the President, the medical community, and the public will begin to heed this message.

A pdf of the panel’s report is available for download at: [http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/ADVISORY/pcp/pcp08-09rpt/PCP\\_Report\\_08-09\\_508.pdf](http://deainfo.nci.nih.gov/ADVISORY/pcp/pcp08-09rpt/PCP_Report_08-09_508.pdf)

