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# Upholding its tradition, a new Lancet piece on chemicals aims to scare rather than inform.

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The current issue of *Lancet Neurology* has a “sky is falling” alarm about the alleged ever-rising threat of environmental chemicals for our children’s neurological development. The authors are well-versed in this subject: not toxicology or neurology, no, we mean they are experts in the subject of trying to scare parents and the media about remote or hypothetical chemical threats. In this case, they wave the skull-and-crossbones banner of a “pandemic of developmental neurotoxicity.” If they hoped to [garner media attention](#) — and they surely did — they succeeded beyond expectations: fright is in the air.

The authors — Drs. Philip Landrigan of Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York and Philippe Grandjean of the Harvard School of Public Health — are long-time “toxic terrorists,” whose careers have been devoted to finding (or at least seeking) chemical toxins in the environment. Here, writing in *Lancet Neurology*, they have assessed the [environment for the presence of certain chemicals](#) they believe to have toxic effects on the developing nervous systems of fetuses, infants, toddlers and children. They have also taken note of the increasing frequency of diagnosing certain conditions related to brain function among our nation’s youngest demographic, and have perceived an increase in both the number of “chemicals of concern” (to them) and the number of young people diagnosed with ADHD or autism-spectrum disorders. Since their tabulation finds increases in both parameters, they have concluded a likely cause-and-effect relationship. Their proposed solution to this problem: tightened chemical regulation, and a national (or, better, international) “clearinghouse” to assess all known chemicals for neurotoxicity, discover unknown chemicals lurking with the same threat, and test anything entering the marketplace before deeming it safe (or at least safe enough).

“How such a baseless assault on ‘chemicals’ can find its way into the pages of an esteemed peer-reviewed journal such as *The Lancet* — Oh excuse me, I can’t stifle my laughter any more,” said ACSH’s Dr. Gil Ross, “Wasn’t it this same ‘esteemed’ journal that published Wakefield’s fraudulent opus on autism and vaccines? The whacko editor, Horton, has still never assumed any responsibility for the devastation and deaths that decision caused. Now, there’s this piece of...junk does it too much honor.

“I give the authors credit, so to speak, for having passed some science or math course at one time, so they should (you’d think) know better than to toss some known environmental and actual chemical toxins in a mix with their own made-up variety and call it a ‘study.’ Sure, lead is an ongoing problem, although of markedly diminished impact compared to Landrigan’s classic reviews dating from 30 years ago. And sure, methylmercury is a potent neurotoxin: so what? The authors make no mention of dose-response, as though the mere presence of a chemical is enough to tag it as a cause of some disorder. Then they feel that just mentioning other alleged ‘toxins’ make them guilty by association (DDT? Really?).

“They also fall for the ages-old fallacy of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*: if some outcome follows some environmental change, the latter must have caused the former, as if opening an umbrella causes it to rain. Other ‘experts’ may have found a similar increase in neurological ailments based on the skyrocketing consumption of organic food, with as much relevance to public health as this nonsense: check out this [tongue in cheek graph](#) which shows a correlation between organic food consumption and autism.

This piece in essence is simply a call for the precautionary principle: if there is ‘concern’ about a chemical — or substance, or behavior — then ban or restrict it until/unless it can be proven ‘safe.’ But when applied to the tens of thousands of chemicals in our environment, our commerce, and our consumer products, if applied as these authors demand, it would require a complete abandonment of our way of life, period. They don’t seem to care, or even take notice. But why should they: they got what they wanted, publicity and scare-mongering adherents.”

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