

CHALLENGES FOR the *OFHI*

invited essay, *Open Forum for Health Information* magazine June 1993

L R B Mann

The Basis of Medicine

The general question which is the basis for proper medicine is: **what would it take to live in accordance with ecological understanding?**

It is necessary to remind people that, for the health of the biosphere, not only humans matter! Poisoning bees, for example, is foolish gambling. Health, and health information, cannot be confined to strictly human phenomena.

Only a good grasp and diligent application of ecology can provide the necessary conditions for good health. This principle is, most unfortunately, unknown or even scorned by all the relevant industries and official agencies, including medical schools.

Nevertheless, before we attack existing structures we should have a clear proposal for improvement. This requirement has been ignored in the widespread attack on allopathy - the system of medicine based in universities using a powerful means of knowledge (*viz.* science) - which has become, wrongfully, a target for incompetent, even dishonest, angry lashings-out from ideologues. The wrongful victimisation by feminists of a leading gynæcologist is among the most horrible examples, but destructive nihilistic attitudes toward allopathy go by now far wider. OFHI must not be captured by this anti-intellectual fad.

Chemical Health Hazards

Thousands of new commercial chemicals are produced each year without satisfactory testing. Delayed toxicity has concerned me more than prompt poisoning. I fear that mental damage is the first to occur as concentrations build - ahead of cancer, mutations, and malformations *in utero*. For all these four categories of delayed harm, there is no evidence of thresholds (safe doses). Animal experiments are inconclusive for human effects but must be relied upon (augmented increasingly by cell- and tissue-culture testing), rather than broadcasting untested chemicals and waiting for surges of human damage. Lack of evidence is not proof of safety.

In 1971 Professor Elliott & I drew NZ's attention to the fact that 2,4,5-T causes birth defects in animals and presumptively in humans. Dow's production of 2,4,5-T was not closed until 17 years later. The trumpeted replacement 'Grazoff' is one atom different. I have concluded (*NZ Envir.* 59 24-27) that fighting the chemical industry one compound at a time is not enough; the main effective scale on which we must work for applied ecology is appropriate land-use *e.g.* road verge management, estuary protection, etc.

The worst mishap so far in the chemical industry was that at Bhopal: 3,500 prompt deaths and over 250,000 chronically ill. Any system of medicine is overwhelmed by such disasters. Siting, management, transport and disposal of major chemical and fuel aggregations in NZ are poorly regulated. The ill-considered Resource Management Act, already admitted to require amendment, will soon come to crucial court interpretation; OFHI may be able to help.

If we were planning to minimise harm from synthetic chemicals in the environment, we would systematically study actual and potential releases in the categories routine v. unintended. Amongst the many appalling deliberate contaminations, the finely-divided airborne lead particles from the heavily-leaded petrol which the oil companies foist on NZ (with the connivance of our Health Dept) is probably the worst, and certainly unnecessary.

In the Third World, agricultural chemicals kill tens of thousands every year; to suppose that they do no significant harm in our country is a delusion but it prevails with all our relevant authorities. (On the other hand, the notion that pesticides are all that ails us is exaggerated in the opposite direction.)

Health Information

Another outrageous insult to public health is fluoridation. Suppression of information on this illustrates some difficulties which OFHI can encounter in trying to live up to its name. An anonymous item on minerals essential for humans & plants in the magazine which OFHI was then putting its name on (*Healthy Options* June/July 1992 p.20) claimed that fluorine is an essential mineral for humans; the only reason stated was "promotes hard bones and teeth". As a former medical-school teacher of nutrition, I then wrote a letter to the editor making the following points. The element fluorine (incidentally not a mineral) is not on the standard lists of essential human nutrients. It is true that high dosages of fluoride harden bones - but they become more brittle and liable to break, as shown by leading surveys of femur breaks in the elderly (*J. Amer. Med. Assn.* 266 513 1991). As for teeth, fluoridation is now known to give little or no benefit and certainly causes some harm even at the official 1 ppm in water supplies (*NZ Environment* 66 5 - 10 1990). The evidence does not support the claim that fluorine (in whatever chemical form) is essential for human nutrition.

The entrepreneuse running the magazine refused to print my letter of correction.

Similarly, she promoted "Genesis 1000" (aqueous sodium chlorite & chlorate) in the Feb/Mar 1991 *Healthy Options* using highly misleading material. Again, corrections were suppressed. "Genesis 1000" had been publicly denounced by even the Health Dept for illegal claims of therapeutic effects not supported by proper evidence. The claim that it boosts oxygen for various parts of the body is implausible. What does seem clear about its chemistry is that chlorite will break down to *chlorine* in the body:

on the face of it, not very therapeutic! Inaccurate, misleading, anonymous propaganda (which I detailed) was printed as though it were editorial reportage, along with a whole-page colour advertisement for "Genesis 1000". OFHI must never again allow its name to be misused on such a publication. Advertorials printed near advertisements spell doom for **open** health information. Similarly, reliable medical advisers do not sell drugs or other commercial items ancillary to their advice.

OFHI must alertly resist the current trend to commercialism. The greed of medics is dwarfed by that of hawkers for such things as "Genesis 1000"; let's not leap out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Sources: Ehrlich, Ehrlich & Holdren 'Ecoscience' Freeman 1977; R Carson 'Silent Spring' Houghton Mifflin 1962; on 2,4,5-T *NZ Envir.* 2 & 3 (1972,3); R van den Bosch 'The Pesticide Conspiracy' (Doubleday 1978); B Selinger 'Chemistry in the Market Place' Harcourt Brace 1986; L R B Mann 'Fear & Loathing in Suburbia - toxic shock chemophobia horror?' *NZ Envir.* 59 24-27 (Spring 1988); S S Epstein 'The Politics of Cancer' and in *The Ecologist*, *passim*.

Dr Robert Mann, Senior Lecturer in Biochemistry and then in Environmental Studies, University of Auckland, is now retired but still working - mainly on solar technology.

N.B.: the published version of this essay was drastically censored by Patricia Holborow PhD, who had just taken over the thereby ludicrously misnamed **Open** Forum for Health Information.

Feminazis have purged me from the Toxic Substances Board and then sued me (+ Radio NZ) for \$30,000 for saying so. The nation's regulation of poisons is going from bad to worse, and I am legally inhibited from pointing out to the public some reasons why.