



post-gazette **NOW** NEWS / HEALTH  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

## Cancer chief sees cell phone risks

**He will alert Pitt institute's faculty, staff to possible health effects**

Wednesday, July 23, 2008

By Joe Fahy, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute and UPMC Cancer Centers plans to issue an advisory to about 3,000 faculty and staff today about the possible health risks associated with cellular phone use.

"Recently I have become aware of the growing body of literature linking long-term cell phone use to possible adverse health effects including cancer," Dr. Ronald Herberman said in the memorandum. "Although the evidence is still controversial, I am convinced that there are sufficient data to warrant issuing an advisory to share some precautionary advice on cell phone use."

The advisory suggests certain measures to limit exposure to electromagnetic radiation emitted by the devices, such as shortening the length of conversations or keeping the phones away from the head by text messaging or using headsets or speaker phone options. It also recommends that children not use cell phones except in emergencies.

A child's developing organs "are the most likely to be sensitive to any possible effects of exposure," according to the document.

In an interview, Dr. Herberman said he hoped the suggestions would spread to others within Pitt and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, as well as to the general public.

He noted that other countries have recommended limits on exposure, and that in Canada, public health officials in Toronto have advised young people to limit cell phone use.

But while there is growing support for limited use, it is not universal.

There is nothing wrong with taking precautions, but "the bottom line, at this time, is that there is no conclusive evidence tying cell phone use to brain cancer," said Dan Catena, a spokesman for the American Cancer Society.

Dr. Herberman believes he is the first U.S. cancer center director to approve the release of such an advisory. And a spokesperson for the National Cancer Institute said officials there were unaware of similar advisories issued by other center directors.

No other major U.S. health care or consumer group has gone as far in advocating for precautions, said Dr. Louis Slesin, editor of Microwave News, which tracks research related to cell phone safety.

Dr. Herberman also has signed on, along with more than 20 other international experts, to a document calling for precautions in using the devices.

Many are from Europe, but they also include several with U.S. ties. Among them are Dr. David Servan-Schreiber, a Pitt medical school professor who spends much of his time in France, and Dr. Devra Davis, director of the Pitt Cancer Institute's Center for Environmental Oncology.

Dr. Servan-Schreiber, a brain cancer survivor, said he solicited experts to support the document, and Dr. Herberman credited Dr. Davis with drawing his attention to the recent research findings.

Release of the document in France last month drew considerable attention from the news media, Dr. Slesin said.

Some of the concerns about cell phone use have come from preliminary data from the 13-country study of cell phone use and tumors known as the Interphone study, he said.

Release of the overall findings has been delayed for more than two years. But a group of European countries has reported an elevated risk for certain brain tumors among long-term cell phone users, particularly on the side of the head where the phone was used, he said.

A separate group of Swedish researchers reported similar findings, Dr. Slesin said.

"From a public health perspective, it makes sense to limit risks," said Dr. Dan Wartenberg, director of environmental epidemiology at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey and one of the international experts calling for precautions.

The group also wants manufacturers to provide phones "with the lowest possible risk" and to "encourage consumers to use their devices in a way that is most compatible with preserving their health."

"We do not need to ban this technology, but to adapt it -- to harness it -- so that it never becomes a major cause of illness," the group noted.

But others question the need for action.

While suggestions that cell phones may be linked to cancer have been around for years, "the science remains so sketchy," said Dr. Matt Quigley, surgical director of neuro-oncology at Allegheny General Hospital.



See documents related to this article:

- [Read Dr. Herberman's memo](#)
- [An analysis of the studies](#)

"The overwhelming majority of studies that have been published in scientific journals around the globe show that wireless phones do not pose a health risk," CTIA-The Wireless Association, a group representing the wireless industry, said in a statement.

Joe Fahy can be reached at [fahy@post-gazette.com](mailto:fahy@post-gazette.com) or 412-263-1722

First published on July 23, 2008 at 12:00 am