

## *From the Kitchen*

25 May 2011



I have been reading a number of books recently, in order to write reviews (one review has already been posted<sup>1</sup>). All four of these books deal with issues of public importance in the area of health. They deal with electromagnetic radiation<sup>1</sup>, mobile phones<sup>2</sup>, vaccination<sup>3</sup> and milk<sup>4</sup>.

There is a common thread through all of these books and it is worrying: the ease with which governments, government authorities and corporations lie to us and the reasons they do so. Of course, it is the individuals in those institutions who do the lying. One result is that the public is manipulated to make choices that suit the liars. Another consequence is an absence of reliable data on which we can base our choices, unless we are willing to go to the almost impossible effort to ferret out the truth for ourselves. We are fortunate that the authors of these four books have done much of the ferretting for us.

When officers of companies lie to us it is understandable, because they have financial and other interests to protect. It is understandable but not defensible. When members of a government and employees of a government bureaucracy lie to us it is neither understandable nor defensible. We should expect those we elect to political office to govern with integrity and we must demand this integrity from those employed to operate the machinery that makes government possible.

Governments seem increasingly to treat citizens as not being intelligent enough to understand data in order to make choices about what is safe and what is dangerous, what is healthy and what is bad for us. In the case of milk, the data seems to be clear that there are broadly two genetic types and that there is a strong correlation of one of these with the incidence of type 1 (early onset) diabetes, autistic spectrum conditions and heart disease. The company that controls the majority of the world-wide dairy market has commercial interests at stake and understandably does not want to acknowledge data that will damage those interests. Governments, and the bureaucracies charged with protecting public health, have no such interests; they should be dispassionate about discharging their responsibilities. For a government body charged with regulating the safety of foods to say that there is no difference between the two types of milk, in the face of clear data to the contrary, plays into the hands of the marketing company and abrogates its responsibility to the citizens. At stake, in one instance, is the value of the New Zealand dairy industry which currently accounts for 20% of that country's export revenue (and is 90% controlled by one company); also at stake are the health and lives of thousands of people in that country. The situation is similar in Australia, Europe and North America.

The debate around the safety of mobile phone use is another important one which is confused by falsehood on the part of businesses which grow rich on this burgeoning market and by the failure of governments and regulators to properly discharge their duties. For some time there has been growing evidence for there being some increased risk of cancer through the use of mobile phones, yet governments have been consistent in reassuring people not to be concerned because the evidence is not clear or conclusive. In the area of public health there is

a precautionary principle which should be applied – if there is any indication that something may be a danger to health, we should be cautious until it is shown to be safe. Increasingly, governments and regulators are saying, “Just keep on doing what you are doing until someone *proves* it to be dangerous and shows conclusively why it is dangerous.”

In the case of mobile phones, people are more than capable of choosing for themselves if they are presented with *all* available data. It is a risk-benefit analysis. We do the same analysis with our use of cars – we are well aware of the risks and weigh these against the benefits of using a car. Cars have been around for more than a century; four generations or more. Mobile phones have been with us for less than one generation. In the very early days of the car, they were not permitted to travel at more than walking pace and someone carrying a flag had to walk in front of each one to warn other road users. This is the precautionary principle at work.

In the area of vaccination we perhaps see the worst examples of governments peddling falsehoods. I am not debating the issues for and against mass vaccination; I am talking purely about the behaviour of governments in relation to vaccination campaigns. There have been numerous cases where a vaccine or a batch of vaccine caused a large number of serious side effects and deaths. The response from governments and responsible government departments and agencies has almost invariably been to play down the adverse effects and to urge people to not stop vaccinating their children. In some cases governments have managed to suppress any publicity about ‘bad’ vaccines or batches of vaccines.

What all this points to is that we need to continue to insist on full and accurate data on anything that affects our health and wellbeing, so that *we* can choose what to do and what to avoid and *we* can demand from government the proper regulation of commercial interests.

1. *The Force: living safely in a world of electromagnetic pollution* by Lyn McLean, Scribe Publishing 2011
2. *Disconnect: the truth about mobile-phone radiation, what the industry has done to hide it, and how to protect your family* by Devra Davis, Scribe Publications 2011
3. *The Panic Virus: fear, myth and the vaccination debate* by Seth Mnookin, Black Inc 2011
4. *Devil in the Milk* by Keith Woodford, Craig Potton Publishing 2007