

Stefania Boccia and Carlo La Vecchia, Editors-in-Chief
Founding, Executive and Consulting Editors
Epidemiology, Biostatistics and Public Health

September 3, 2015

Dear Dr. Boccia and Dr. La Vecchia,

Thank you for your response of August 28, 2015 to the serious issues we raised in our letters to EBPH of July 17, 2015 and August 11, 2015.

We are glad that EBPH has published Errata providing Competing Interests Statements by the authors of the three asbestos articles that were recently published by EBPH. We are also glad that the EBPH will be discussing the issues we have raised at the conference of the Italian Society of Medical Statistics and Clinical Epidemiology (SISMEC) in September.

We are disappointed, however, that the response rejects our request that EBPH seriously evaluate the possibility of retracting Ilgren's articles; carry out a thorough evaluation of the scientific and ethical quality of the peer review process used by the EBPH reviewers to assess Ilgren's articles; and initiate an investigation to evaluate whether Ilgren's articles comply with the scientific standards and editorial policies of EBPH and whether there is any evidence of editorial fraud by Ilgren and colleagues.

The response you provided rejects these requests without addressing the evidence we submitted. EBPH states that it has examined its own conduct and found its own conduct satisfactory. We trust you will agree that an internal process, completely lacking in transparency and independence, to examine one's own conduct, and which arbitrarily dismisses serious complaints, is neither ethical nor persuasive.

The response dismisses as "incorrect" and "wrong" the concern we raised that Ilgren et al. cited their article, "Further Studies of Bolivian Crocidolite –Part IV: Fibre Width, Fibre Drift and their relation to Mesothelioma Induction", which was published by EBPH in 2015, as having been published in 2012 by the journal, Annals of Respiratory Medicine. The response provides absolutely no evidence to show that our concern is "incorrect" or "wrong". The response ignores the documentation we provided which shows that in an article published in 2014, Ilgren et al. cited "Further Studies of Bolivian Crocidolite –Part IV: Fibre Width, Fibre Drift and their relation to Mesothelioma Induction" as having been published in 2012 by the journal, Annals of Respiratory Medicine.

EBPH offers the following as a purported explanation for its dismissal of the concern we raised: "the authors are the solely responsible for their work, especially if they send the same manuscript to different journals. When they submit a manuscript, EBPH clearly requires that the manuscript has not been submitted elsewhere. If the author declare the false, this is impossible to check from editors."

It is not, however, “impossible” for EBPH to check with the authors, Ilgren et al., as to whether they provided false information to EBPH. This is what any journal would be expected to do. We assume, therefore, that EBPH raised this matter with Ilgren et al. Yet EBPH provides no information as to what response Ilgren et al. furnished.

The response we have received from EBPH demonstrates, in our opinion, an unacceptable disregard of scientific and ethical standards. We hope that, in the discussions on these issues that will take place at the upcoming SISMEC conference in September, there will be commitment to take serious action on these matters.

Sincerely,

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Roberta Pirastu, Sapienza Rome University

Pietro Comba, Istituto Superiore di Sanità, Rome

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Notes:

Titles and affiliations are given for identification purposes only.

*Please send responses to Kathleen Ruff, kruff@bulkley.net

Conflict of Interest Statement:

Roberta Pirastu, Maria Angela Vigotti, Guadalupe Madrid, Cuauhtémoc Pérez, Fernand Turcotte, Morris Greenberg, Lennart Hardell, T. Joshi, Rolf Petersen, Sanjay Chaturvedi, Annie Thébaud-Mony, Vilma Santanta, Mohamed Jeebhay, Lygia Budnik and Kathleen Ruff have no conflict of interest to

declare. Elisabetta Chellini and Pietro Comba have served as a consultant for the Prosecutor in some criminal trials concerning asbestos and other environmental carcinogens. Francesco Forastiere has served as an expert witness for the Court in a trial for asbestos related mesotheliomas and has served as expert for the Judge in trials involving environmental contamination and occupational exposures. Prof. Witowitz has testified on behalf of plaintiffs in asbestos litigation cases in German Social Courts lawsuits. Xaver Baur has testified in occupational diseases litigation on behalf of plaintiffs and provides independent expert opinions for social courts or statutory insurances. Richard Lemen and Arthur Frank have been involved in asbestos litigation as expert witnesses on behalf of plaintiffs and serve as Co-Science Advisors to the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization. Colin Soskolne has served as an expert witness between 2011 and 2013 on asbestos cases for plaintiff attorneys; all fees were donated to the University of Alberta. Øyvind Omland serves as a representative for the Danish Health and Medicine Authority in the Danish Industrial Injury Board.

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