

LETTER TO:

- Prof. Jaak Ph Janssens, President, European Cancer Prevention Organisation and Editor-in-Chief, European Journal of Cancer Prevention
- Members of the Board, European Cancer Prevention Organisation

January 28, 2014

Dear Prof. Janssens and Board Members:

Request to the President and Board Members of the European Cancer Prevention Organisation

We wish to bring a serious matter to your attention and to request that you take action to address it.

Dr. Carlo La Vecchia is an [Associate Editor](#) of the European Journal of Cancer Prevention, the official journal of your organisation, the [European Cancer Prevention Organisation](#) (ECPO). Dr. La Vecchia is also a member of the ECPO [International Advisory Board](#).

Dr. La Vecchia is a share-holder and a [Director of Research](#) of the International Prevention Research Institute (IPRI), a private, for-profit consulting company formed in 2009.

In 2011, Dr. La Vecchia and Dr. Paolo Boffetta, Vice-President in charge of Research of IPRI, were paid by the Italian Montefibre company to testify in a court case in which the company was charged with criminal negligence in regard to the deaths of a number of its workers from mesothelioma, caused by exposure to asbestos. Drs. La Vecchia and Boffetta testified in support of the company's argument that if workers had been exposed to asbestos in the 1950s and 1960s, then it did not matter if they were subsequently exposed to asbestos. According to Drs. La Vecchia and Boffetta, repeated, subsequent exposure to asbestos does not cause additional harm to health. Therefore, since the managers from the 1950s and 1960s had already died, the more recent company managers would be given impunity for having continued to expose the workers to asbestos over the ensuing decades.

While an appeal of the court case was pending, Drs. La Vecchia and Boffetta published an article in your journal, the European Journal of Cancer Prevention, entitled [Role of stopping exposure and recent exposure to asbestos in the risk of mesothelioma](#), which put forward the same arguments they had been paid to advance in court. In their article, Drs. La Vecchia and Boffetta stated that their review of the scientific literature showed "consistent evidence that for workers occupationally exposed in the distant past, the risk of mesothelioma is not appreciably influenced by subsequent exposures. Further,

stopping exposure does not materially modify the risk of mesothelioma over subsequent decades.”

The article was submitted on Wednesday, September 28, 2011 and accepted four days later on Sunday, October 2, 2011, an extremely speedy process, which suggests that serious, due diligence through peer review did not take place.

The article is contaminated by serious scientific and ethical flaws.

The “review of the scientific literature” carried out by Drs. La Vecchia and Boffetta was selectively restricted to a limited number of papers. Their so-called review carefully omitted articles in the scientific literature, which demonstrate that continued, increased exposure to asbestos does, in fact, cause additional harm to workers. IARC has shown in multiple studies that as exposures increase, risk increases.

The bias of Dr. La Vecchia’s and Dr. Boffetta’s article is highlighted by epidemiologist, Dr. Dario Mirabelli, who points out that they “cite our most recent [article](#)¹ on mortality among workers in the Eternit plant in Casale Monferrato, but they do not cite our main result, which is that mesothelioma mortality is directly proportional to the duration of exposure to asbestos.”²

The article by Drs. La Vecchia and Boffetta serves the interests of the company that had hired them. It goes against the goals that ECPO claims to pursue, namely that of preventing cancer and helping cancer victims and their families. Contrary to the goals of ECPO, the court testimony and the article duplicating the court testimony of Dr. La Vecchia serve to deny justice to asbestos victims and to increase cancer risks for workers by endorsing continued exposure to asbestos as non-harmful. Dr. La Vecchia’s testimony and article also serve to promote impunity for companies that have subjected their workers to repeated and continued exposure to asbestos, which acts as an incentive for corporate managers and companies to continue doing so.

A further example of ethical misconduct by Drs. La Vecchia and Boffetta is the fact that they stated in the article that they had “no conflicts of interest”. This is a false statement. They omitted to declare the fact that they had been hired and paid by the Montefibre company to put forward this exact argument in court.

The European Journal of Cancer Prevention states the following:

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST <http://edmgr.ovid.com/ejcp/accounts/ifauth.htm>

“Authors must state all possible conflicts of interest in the manuscript, including financial, consultant, institutional and other relationships that might lead to bias or a conflict of interest.”

¹ Magnani C, Ferrante D, Barone-Adesi F, Bertolotti M, Todesco A, Mirabelli D, Terracini B., Cancer risk after cessation of asbestos exposure: a cohort study of Italian asbestos cement workers. *Occup Environ Med.* 2008 Mar;65(3):164-70. Epub 2007 Aug 17.

² Stéphane Fourcart, Amiante : une curieuse expertise, *Le Monde*, December 18, 2013

Dr. La Vecchia's statement that he had no conflicts of interest violates the conflicts of interest requirement of the official journal of the ECPO.

It is, in our opinion, completely unacceptable that an Associate Editor of a scientific journal can be permitted to violate the ethical standards he is supposed to uphold. If the Associate Editor does not respect the conflict of interest requirements of his own journal, this sends a strong message that the journal's conflicts of interest standards are not to be taken seriously.

The article by Dr. La Vecchia contains additional improprieties. The article states:

“This work was conducted with the contribution of the Italian Association for Cancer Research (AIRC), project No. 10068.”

This is false. AIRC has confirmed that they provided no funding for this work.³ Thus, the good reputation of AIRC has been falsely used to lend credibility to the article. This was certainly advantageous to the interests of the Montefibre company in its recent and ongoing court case claiming impunity for the deaths of its workers. It is extremely disturbing that the credibility of an organisation that works to prevent cancer and to help cancer victims was falsely used to lend legitimacy to an article that serves to deny justice to cancer victims and to increase risks of cancer harm.

We attach an in-depth investigative report of December 18, 2013 by Le Monde's science journalist, Stéphane Foucart, *Epidémiologie: des liaisons dangereuses. Amiante: une curieuse expertise*. The report documents many examples of how Dr. La Vecchia's consulting company has published articles, financed by toxic industries, which come up with distorted conclusions, favourable to the industry that financed the article, and which deny harm caused by substances that have been recognized by IARC and the reputable scientific community as known carcinogens, such as diesel fumes.

We believe that Dr. La Vecchia's conduct, as documented above, is incompatible with holding the position of Associate Editor of the European Cancer Prevention Organisation's official European Journal of Cancer Prevention and is incompatible with being a member of your organisation's International Advisory Board.

- **We therefore request that you terminate Dr. La Vecchia's position as Associate Editor of your journal and his position as a member of your International Advisory Board.**
- **We furthermore urge you to publish a correction of the inaccurate information that was put forward in the article by Drs. La Vecchia and Boffetta.**

³ Letter from Maria I. Colnaghi, Italian Association for Cancer Research (AIRC), January 20, 2014

We look forward to receiving your response. We hope that the European Cancer Prevention Organisation will take this opportunity to clearly demonstrate its commitment to preventing cancer and to upholding scientific and ethical standards.

Kindly send your response to Kathleen Ruff, kruff@bulkley.net.

Sincerely,

SIGNED BY THE FOLLOWING INDIVIDUAL SIGNERS AND ORGANISATIONS

NOTE: The following individual signers are listed in alphabetical order. Titles and affiliations are given for identification purposes only. Some of the signers have been involved in asbestos litigation.

Syed Mezab Ahmed, General Secretary, S.F.A.M. Mesothelioma General Hospital Foundation, Karachi, Pakistan

Dr. Wael Al-Delaimy, MD, PhD, Chief, Division of Global Health, Family and Preventive Medicine, University of California, San Diego, CA, USA

Prof. Angelo Baracca, Professor, University of Florence, and Medicina Democratica, Italy

Dr. Pietro Barbieri, Mesothelioma Register of Brescia Province; Director of the Local Health Occupational Service, Brescia, Northern Italy

Prof. Dr. med. Xaver Baur, Institute for Occupational Medicine, Charité University Medicine Berlin, Germany

Lucie Bechard, Widow of Asbestos Victim and Co-founder & Chair of the Victims of Asbestos/Industrial Disease, Canada

Dott.ssa Fiorella Belpoggi, Direttore, Centro di Ricerca sul Cancro Cesare Maltoni, Istituto Ramazzini, Bologna, Italy

Alain Bobbio, secrétaire national de l'Association Nationale de Défense des Victimes de l'Amiante (ANDEVA), France

Nathalie Belleau, conseillère syndicale, Conseil central Montréal-métropolitain-CSN, Québec, Canada

Dr. Matilda van den Bosch, MD, PhD, researcher; Directing board member and national representative in the International Society of Doctors for the Environment (ISDE), Sweden

Dr. Thora Brendstrup, PhD, Speciallæge i Arbejdsmedicin; Chair, EWHN, European Work Hazards Network

Dr. James Brophy, PhD, Visiting Research Fellow, University of Stirling, Scotland; former Executive Director, Occupational Health Clinics for Ontario Workers, Canada

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Dr. Franco Carnevale, Occupational physician and historian on health of workers, Florence, Italy

Dr. Barry Castleman, ScD, Environmental Consultant; Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini, Italy; author, *Asbestos: Medical and Legal Aspects*, USA

Dr. Yeyong Choi, Ph.D. of Public Health, School of Public Health, Seoul National University, South Korea

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Perry Gottesfeld, MPH, Occupational Knowledge International

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Ted Smith, Coordinator, International Campaign for Responsible Technology, San Jose, CA, USA

Dr. Morando Soffritti, MD, Honorary President, Ramazzini Institute, Bologna, Italy

Dr. Colin L. Soskolne, Professor Emeritus, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada; Fellow, Collegium Ramazzini, Italy; Fellow, American College of Epidemiology; Adjunct Professor, University of Canberra, ACT, Australia; two term Past-President, Canadian Society for Epidemiology and Biostatistics (2007-2009, 2009-2011), Canada

Dr. Christian Späth, MD, Specialist for Occupational Health, Facharzt für Arbeitsmedizin, Praxis für Arbeitsmedizin und Sicherheitstechnik, Göttingen, Germany

Dr. Olga Speranskaya, Co-Chair, IPEN (Internationals POPS Elimination Network); Eco-Accord, Russia; advocacy work on health and environment issues, campaigning against asbestos threat in EECCA region and beyond

Larry Stoffman, Director, Occupational Health & Safety, UFCW (United Food & Commercial Workers), BC, Canada

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Marie-José Voisin, Associate Professor, Université Paris Diderot, France

Robert Vojakovic, AM, JP, President, Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia Inc.

Dr. Y.R.K. Waterman, PhD, LL.M, the Netherlands

Dr. Josette Wier, MD, Smithers, BC, Canada

Univ.-Prof. em. Dr. med. Hans-Joachim Weitowitz, Former Director of the Institute and Outpatient Clinic of Occupational and Social Medicine of the Justus-Liebig University of Giessen, Germany

Dr. Jean Zigby, MD, Family Physician, Palliative Care Specialist; President, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment, Canada

ORGANISATIONS

[Association of Asbestos Relatives and Victims](#) (AFeVA), Casale Monferrato, Italy, representing 35.000 citizens and more than 1,800 victims of asbestos.

[Association Nationale de Défense des Victimes de l'Amiante](#) (ANDEVA), France

APROMAC Environment Protection Association, Brazil

[Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization](#) (ADAO), USA

[Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and environmental Health](#) (ANROEV)

[Association Henri Pézerat](#), France

[A Walk to Remember Victims of Asbestos](#), Canada

[Ban Asbestos France](#)

[Ban Asbestos Network of India](#) (BANI), India

Barrow Trades Council, UK

[Environics Trust](#), Delhi, India

[European Work Hazards Network](#)

German Asbestos Victims Group, Germany

[Greater Manchester Hazards Centre](#), UK

[Institute for Occupational Health and Safety Development](#), Philippines

[International Ban Asbestos Secretariat](#)

Local Initiative for OSH Network (LION) Indonesia

Management Committee of [London Hazards](#), UK

[Medicina Democratica Onlus](#), Italy

[Merseyside Asbestos Victims Support Group](#), UK

[Northeast Asbestos Support & Awareness Group](#), Middlesbrough, UK

[Occupational and Environmental Health Network of India](#) (OEHNI), India, working with asbestos victims in different parts of the country

[Peoples Training & Research Centre, India](#)

[Prevent Cancer Now](#), Canada

[RightOnCanada.ca](#), Canada

[Sierra Club Canada](#)

TOXISPHERA Environmental Health Association, Brazil

[ToxicsWatch Alliance](#) (TWA), India

[Uganda Network on Toxic Free Malaria Control](#) (UNETMAC), Kampala, Uganda.

[Union des travailleurs et travailleuses accidentés de Montréal](#) (UTTAM), Canada

[UK National Hazards Campaign](#), UK

[Women International for a Common Future](#)

