

McMurtry commentary on Chapman “nocebo” paper

Author: McMurtry, Robert

‘Spatio-temporal differences in the history of health and noise complaints about Australian wind farms: evidence for the psychogenic, “communicated disease” hypothesis.’ Pre-Print: submitted for publication. Chapman S et al. 15 March 2013 [[download](#)]

This paper appears to require more vigorous editing or peer review in regards to its bibliography and many other elements (see below). The references are highly selective and appear to reflect a confirmation bias by referencing industry and their consultants sources while omitting more than 20 peer review publications regarding the presence of adverse health effects in the environs of industrial wind turbines.

The introductory section has an editorial tone disclaiming the validity of reports before the research is undertaken. It has the appearance of stating the conclusions of the enquiry before critical analysis. The bias evident in this section undermines any claim to objectivity by the authors, particularly the senior author who has been making these same claims on his active “Crikey” blog site (www.crikey.com.au/author/simonchapman/). The title of one the articles cited on the blog Simon Chapman states: “Latest wind farm research is a load of hot air”. The date of the article is October 14, 2011. This statement provides an insight into the senior author’s bias. He had reached the principle conclusion of his paper before publishing the research.

In addition one would expect some reference to more than 20 peer review publications attesting to adverse health effects in the introduction or elsewhere in the paper but such referencing was omitted or possibly excluded.

The section on methods is deficient as it contains inadequate detail about such matters as the basis of selection of sources of media exposure. No bibliometric analysis was carried out in regards to information published by wind industry proponents to which people in the environs of wind farms were also exposed. In short there is no context for the media exposure relating to competing claims.

Secondly the authors acknowledge that a key data source was the industry’s own records of complaints. The conflict of interest is obvious. The claimed adjustment for this shortfall was made by evaluating witnesses at state hearings: “we therefore reviewed all 1,594 submissions made to three government enquiries on wind farms”. This is not a substitute for direct evaluation of residents which to be credible requires surveying the relevant population with validated survey instruments. Furthermore the assumption [is stated] that “Wind farm operators have clear interest in any reactions of nearby residents to the farms they operate”. In view of the industry’s recurrent denial of adverse health effects this statement is an unwarranted assumption and perhaps disingenuous.

Another major shortfall in the paper is the failure to mention 3 peer review studies (2, 3, 5) describing studies from the United States, New Zealand and Canada. In all these publications

it was found that neighbours of wind farms were favourably disposed to wind energy prior to the commencement of operations. With the development of adverse health effects, understandably their views changed.

Another shortcoming in the methods is that no sound measurements were done. The authors have no direct measurement to what people were actually being exposed. At the Chatham Kent Environmental Review Tribunal (1) of 2011 in Ontario, Canada, the wind industry's legal counsel rejected an earlier version of Nissenbaum et al's (4) research because only the distance from turbine and the size were referenced. The shortcoming was corrected in the final paper. A better methodology would be to develop a dose-response curve, i.e. noise exposure charted against health effects. Others have found this relationship (X) but once again this work is not referenced by Chapman et al.

Other omissions include the failure to mention the growing size of wind farms and the increased scale of the turbines themselves which has occurred worldwide. This fact is an important explanation for the increased incidence of adverse health effects (3).

Summary

Having received this paper in the last 24 hours and knowing the timeline for submission to the Cherry Tree hearings, the review is necessarily brief. Nonetheless it is clear there is reason to believe the senior author is significantly biased and that the methodology of this research is inadequate. These inadequacies are not trivial. On the contrary they call the work of Chapman et al into serious doubt.

Robert Y McMurtry CM, MD, FRCSC, FACS

Addendum

I have attached another [paper by Salt and Hullar](#) which may be helpful to the deliberators in this process. It describes the unique nature of wind turbine noise and a credible hypothesis for the pathogenesis of adverse health effects in the environs of wind turbines.

(1) Environmental Review Tribunal, Ontario. (2011). Erickson v. Director, Ministry of the Environment (Case Nos.: 10-121/10-122). Retrieved from www.ert.gov.on.ca/files/201107/00000300-AKT5757C7CO026-BGI54ED19RO026.pdf

[The conclusion reached by the ERT was: "This case has successfully shown that the debate should not be simplified to one about whether wind turbines can cause harm to humans. The evidence presented to the Tribunal demonstrates that they can, if facilities are placed too close to residents. The debate has now evolved to one of degree."]

(2) Krogh C, Gillis L, Kouwen N, Aramini J. WindVOiCe, a self-reporting survey: adverse health effects, industrial wind turbines, and the need for vigilance monitoring. *Bull Sci Tech Soc* 2011;31:334-9.

(3) Møller M, Pedersen C. Low frequency noise from large wind turbines. *J Acoust Soc Am* 2010;129:3727-44.

(4) Nissenbaum MA, Aramini JJ, Hanning CD. Effects of industrial wind turbine noise on sleep and health. *Noise Health* 2012;14(60):237-43. doi:10.4103/1463-1741.102961

(5) Shepherd D, McBride D, Welch D, Dirks K, Hill E. Evaluating the impact of wind turbine noise on health related quality of life. *Noise Health* 2011;13:333-9.