

Learning and Developmental Disabilities Initiative (LDDI)

A working group of the Collaborative on Health and the Environment

Conference Call Notes

Monday, April 10, 2006

Next call: Tuesday, June 20th at 2:00 p.m. Eastern

NOTES

Participants

- Michele Gagnon, American Association for Mental Retardation
- Neil Gendel, Healthy Children Organizing Project
- Lee Grossman, Autism Society of America
- Natalie Jeremijenko, University of California-San Diego
- Kathy Lawson, Learning Disabilities Association of America
- Marianne McCoy, Healthy Schools Network
- Claudia Miller, University of Texas Health Science Center
- Elise Miller, Institute for Children's Environmental Health
- Mark Opler, Columbia University
- Ted Schettler, Science and Environmental Health Network
- Kathleen Schuler, Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy
- Gabriela Silvani, Environmental Media Services
- Theodora Tsongas, Oregon Public Health, Department of Human Services
- Julia Varshavsky, Commonweal/CHE Administrative Office
- Amy Winans, Learning Disabilities Association of Michigan and Association for Children's Mental Health

[If you were on the call and we do not have you listed here, please contact us with your name, affiliation and contact information.]

1) Science update

Mark Opler, PhD, MPH, a researcher based at Columbia University, presented his research on the role of prenatal lead exposure in schizophrenia. Using prenatal serum collected and frozen from 1959-1966 as part of the Childhood Health and Development Study, led by Dr. J. Yerushalmy in northern California, records that were then computerized in the 1980s by the Kaiser Permanente Health Care system, Dr. Opler and his colleagues were able to find those whose serum had been collected prenatally and who had been later treated for or diagnosed with psychiatric diseases. They did face-to-face interviews with over 170 people from the original cohort of 19,000. Dr. Opler's research shows that mid-pregnancy exposure to lead may be associated with an increased risk of schizophrenia; in fact the risk of schizophrenia was approximately doubled if the fetus was exposed to 15 nanograms/deciliter or more of lead during the second trimester. Dr. Opler aims to further explore this relationship in an additional sample of subjects from a second collection of serum that was done in the Boston/Providence area at around the same time. His paper on this subject is posted at <http://www.iceh.org/LDDImeetings.html>.

Action: Dr. Opler offered to develop a brief fact sheet on lead and schizophrenia for lay audiences. Elise will follow up with him in that regard.

Elise reminded participants that LDDI has published a new fact sheet synthesizing some of the emerging research on environmental exposures and psychological disorders. She noted that Michele Gagnon took the lead compiling this information and that she and Ted Schettler helped with drafting and finalizing the fact sheet. Please see <http://www.iceh.org/LDDIpublications.html>.

2) LDDI National Conference plans

Elise mentioned that Howie Frumkin has invited LDDI to have a session or track at the the Center for Disease Control's National Center for Environmental Health and the Agency for Toxic Substances Disease Registry environmental health conference in Atlanta December 4-6, 2006 (more information at <http://www.cdc.gov/nceh/conference/index.html>). She noted that the planning committee for the LDDI national conference would be having a call later that day, but she wanted feedback from the group as to whether they thought that participating in the CDC's conference should be in lieu of a separate LDDI national conference. The participants on the call seemed to agree that though the CDC was an interesting opportunity, it would still be important for LDDI, as a national collaborative of primarily NGOs and some academic and government institutions, to hold its own meeting. In addition, participants discussed creating a broad framework for the LDDI conference to include health disparities and other factors that contribute to development, while still having the primary focus on neurotoxicants. Since these other factors are not being underscored at the government sponsored forums (the CDC conference or a proposed NIEHS one in the winter of 2007), this would also add a unique draw to the LDDI conference. (Update: The LDDI National Planning Committee agreed with this discussion.) Planning members will follow up with the CDC as to what LDDI might do at that conference and recommended that the LDDI national meeting should be held in May 2007.)

3) Parkinson's disease and collaborative work with LDDI

Elise mentioned that there has been discussion in CHE National about creating an umbrella work group that would include efforts on neurodevelopmental diseases AND neurodegenerative diseases, like Parkinson's, that are linked to environmental contaminants. Given that toxicants like pesticides may impact neurological development in a range of ways manifesting over a lifetime, it seems useful to acknowledge this by broadening our framework. This would not take away from either LDDI or the Parkinson's Disease Working Group, but would allow the conversation, particularly in terms of the emerging science, to take place by looking at these different health endpoints. The Parkinson's group is now planning a Wingspread-like conference in which they would develop a white paper, much like the Wingspread paper on endocrine-disrupting chemicals, which proved pivotal in bringing that issue to the public's attention. As this moves forward, Elise will likely oversee CHE's broader neurodevelopmental/neurodegenerative disease efforts.

4) Recent meetings

- Developmental Neurotoxicity Testing conference (Washington, DC, March 13-15) – Elise mentioned that she presented on LDDI at this international conference, sponsored by Johns Hopkins University, which was primarily attended by government and corporate scientists interested in developing new methodologies for testing potential neurotoxicants. These methods include in vitro, in vivo and in silica and would allow for far greater throughput and the use of far fewer animals.
- National Association for the Dually Diagnosed conference (Boston, MA, March 17-18) – Elise mentioned that she, Michele Gagnon and Ted Schettler had presented the first environmental health session at a NADD conference. Though the turnout for the session was sparse, those who attended highly recommended that more of this information be made available to NADD

members. Elise met with the executive director and president of the board of NADD, who are very interested in engaging more with LDDI and highlighting environmental health issues more significantly at their future meetings.

5) Member updates

- Learning Disabilities Association's Health Children Project (LDA's HCP): Kathy Lawson mentioned that, at LDA's annual conference in March, Peter Scheidt spoke about the National Children's Study and she provided information for LDA members to write to Congressional leaders about sustaining funding for the NCS. She also said that had outstanding speakers including Pete Myers and Ted Schettler for the Medical Symposium, which is traditionally held the day before the LDA conference. In addition, HCP gave out four mini-grants to LDA chapters in California, Missouri, Michigan and Iowa to further their work on environmental health. She has also been working on a number of environmental health projects in Pittsburgh with the McGee Women's Hospital and other institutions.
- American Association for Mental Retardation's (AAMR's) Environmental Health Project: Michele Gagnon mentioned that she will be presenting on environmental health in 5 to 6 different state AAMR chapters in the next few months. In addition, AAMR's next science teleconference call will be held April 19th at 2:00 p.m. Eastern. This call will feature Dr. Bruce Lanphear who will speak on "Low-Level Lead Toxicity: The Ongoing Search for a Threshold." Please contact Michele Gagnon for more information: mgagnon@aamr.org. She also said that AAMR's next teleconference call in May or June may highlight the efforts of self-advocates on environmental health.
- Autism Society of America's (ASA's) new Environmental Health Project: Lee Grossman mentioned that their press briefing at the National Press Club on March 30th, which focused on the growing evidence between mercury, vaccines and autism, went well. ASA has also issued a press release, news wire and e-newsletter in regards to their new Environmental Health Project. He is organizing the advisory committee, which will include Martha Herbert, Dave Humphrey and Elise Miller among others, to determine how to shape and prioritize this effort.
- State LDDI initiatives: Amy Winans mentioned that the LDA of Michigan is now working with other organizations to ban lindane. Elise mentioned that Heather Loukmas with the LDA of New York State is also pressing to ban lindane in that state. In addition, the LDA of Minnesota, which is spearheading the LDDI effort in that state, will host the next meeting on April 27th of the "Preventing Harm to Growing Brains" group that formed after the LDDI regional meeting in Minneapolis last January. For more information, contact Kathleen Schuler at kschuler@iatp.org.

6) Legislative database

Elise mentioned that LDDI has unveiled a preliminary database of legislation related to neurotoxicants at <http://www.iceh.org/LDDIlegislation.html>. So far, this database includes legislation on the national level and in three states as well as some organizations that are working on policy issues related to the legislation listed. Users can search by location and/or by neurotoxicant. We invite LDDI members to provide feedback to guide our continued research in other states. Please send comments to Elise Miller, emiller@iceh.org.

7) Practice Prevention columns

Elise let the group know that the next column will focus on the health implications of certain chemicals in plastics.

8) Next call

Tuesday, June 20th at 2:00 p.m. Eastern