



The Alliance for a **HEALTHY TOMORROW**

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Toxic chemicals found in Mass. doctor and nurse *Call for legislature to take action*

Boston, MA—Mercury, phthalates, bisphenol A (BPA) and other toxic chemicals have been found in the bodies of a doctor and nurse in Massachusetts whose blood and urine were tested as part of a national study whose results were released today. The study, *Hazardous Chemicals In Health Care*, is the first investigation ever of chemicals found in the bodies of health care professionals. It found that all of the 20 study participants had toxic chemicals associated with health care settings in their bodies. These chemicals are all linked to chronic illness and physical disorders.

The study participants from Massachusetts were **Dr. Sean Palfrey**, professor of pediatrics and public health at Boston University School of Medicine, and medical director of Boston's Lead Poisoning Prevention Program and **Mimi Pomerleau, DNP**, Assistant Clinical Professor Lawrence Memorial Regis College, OB Nurse MGH. The chemicals tested in the investigation are used in products common to the health care setting, from baby bottles, hand sanitizer, and medical gauges, to industrial paints, IV bags and tubes and stain-resistant clothing.

Both participants joined Representative Jay Kaufman (D-Lexington), and the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow in calling for passage of the **Safer Alternatives Bill** (H-757 & S-442) sponsored by Kaufman and Senator Steven Tolman (D-Brighton) and co-sponsored by 98 Representatives and 25 Senators. The bill will create a program in Massachusetts to systematically replace toxic chemicals with safer alternatives when feasible, targeting those that are significant hazards in the workplace or for children.

“We were tested for chemicals that have been associated with diseases that are on the rise.” said Palfrey. “If we as physicians are to understand our patients’ health problems – from cancer to neurological harm to reproductive dysfunctions - we need to take a look at chemical exposure in our bodies. We also need to advocate for policies, like the Safer Alternatives Bill, that will keep these chemicals out of our bodies in the future.”

“Even those who care for the most vulnerable in our society are very much at risk for these exposures,” said Kaufman. “If an expert in toxic chemical exposure like Dr. Palfrey can’t even avoid being contaminated, none of us can. The system we have is broken and we have an opportunity here in Massachusetts to fix it.”

Study findings include:

- Each participant had at least 24 individual chemicals present, four of which are on the recently released Environmental Protection Agency list of priority chemicals for regulation.
- Eighteen chemicals were detected in every single participant
- All twenty participants had at least five of the six major types of chemicals tested
- Thirteen participants tested positive for all six of these major chemical types
- All participants had bisphenol A, phthalates, PBDEs and PFCs, priority chemicals for regulation by the FDA and associated with chronic illness such as cancer and endocrine malfunction

Hazardous Chemicals in Health Care offers preliminary indicators of what the broader health care community may be experiencing. Twelve doctors and eight nurses around the country were tested for the presence of chemicals used in the health care setting that are associated with health problems and are pervasive in our environment. The project tested for 62 distinct chemicals in six categories: bisphenol A, mercury, perfluorinated compounds, phthalates, polybrominated diphenyl ethers, and triclosan. Palfrey had 21 PBDEs, four perfluorinated compounds and mercury in his blood, and bisphenol A, triclosan, and metabolites (chemicals after the body has digested them) of all five phthalates in his urine. Tests found 18 PBDEs, three perfluorinated compounds and mercury in Pomerleau's blood and bisphenol A and metabolites for all five phthalates in her urine.

Said Pomerleau, "As a nurse caring for women and newborns, I know that my patients' health is often compromised by the chemicals in their everyday environment. Learning about what's in my own body made it very personal and has convinced me even more that we need our government to take decisive action to protect our health from toxic chemicals."

"We need to do better to protect everyone's health, and we can," said Elizabeth Saunders, Environmental Health Legislative Director for Clean Water Action, a founding member of the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow Coalition. "There are plenty of companies that are doing business and making products using safer alternatives and finding new technologies every day. If some companies can do it, all of them should and the Safer Alternatives Bill will move us in that direction."

The report was released by Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) in partnership with the American Nurses Association (ANA) and Health Care Without Harm (HCWH). PSR, ANA and HCWH have joined the national Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families campaign, a diverse and growing coalition of organizations, businesses and individuals united by concern about the toxic chemicals in our homes, places of work and in products used every day. The coalition is working to reform the federal law governing toxic chemicals, the Toxic Substance Control Act (TSCA) calling for eliminating the most dangerous chemicals from commerce, holding chemical companies responsible for information about health and environmental impacts of chemicals, and using the best science to protect all people and vulnerable groups, including children. (see www.saferchemicals.org)

The report can be found at www.healthytomorrow.org. In addition to data on testing, the report includes recommendations on how health care professionals can protect their patients and themselves by avoiding the use of toxic chemicals.

About the Organizations

Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow (AHT) is a Massachusetts coalition of citizens, scientists, health professionals, workers, and educators seeking preventive action on toxic hazards. There are 160 national, statewide, and local organizations. www.healthytomorrow.org

Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) is a non-profit advocacy organization that is the medical and public health voice for policies to prevent nuclear war and proliferation and to slow, stop and reverse global warming and toxic degradation of the environment. PSR's 32,400 medical and health professionals and concerned citizen members, 31 PSR chapters, over 60 Student PSR chapters at medical and public health schools, and over 25,000 e-activists, along with national and chapter board members and staff, form a unique nationwide network committed to a safe and healthy world. www.psr.org

The American Nurses Association (ANA) is the only full-service professional organization representing the interests of the nation's 2.9 million registered nurses through its constituent member nurses associations, its organizational affiliates, and its workforce advocacy affiliate, the Center for American Nurses. The ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting the rights of nurses in the workplace, projecting a positive and realistic view of nursing, and by lobbying the Congress and regulatory agencies on health care issues affecting nurses and the public. www.nursingworld.org

Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) is an international coalition of more than 430 organizations in 52 countries, working to transform the health care industry worldwide, without compromising patient safety or care, so that it is ecologically sustainable and no longer a source of harm to public health and the environment. www.noharm.org