

nonsmokers. "In science and medicine," Siegel wrote in his blog, "we have a technical term that can be used to describe such a contention: a bunch of crap."²³

Since ASH was promoting this line in the context of outdoor smoking, I asked Siegel if he thought they were right about half-hour heart attacks from indoor smoking. "Of course not," he said. "As for outdoor smoking, I've never seen a credible study that has ever killed anybody in any amount of time. If 30 minutes can cause fatal heart attacks, we'd have noticed it. People would be dying like flies."

On August 27, 2002, the eve of the Bloomberg ban proposal, Jane E. Brody, the *Times* health guru, headlined a column "A Jubilant Barroom Toast to Smoke-Free Air."²⁴ She wrote: "Heart disease deaths from passive smoking is the third leading preventable cause of death, after active smoking and alcohol... rivaling deaths from traffic accidents in this country each year." She then declared: "I for one refuse to dine in any restaurant that permits smoking or makes me walk through a smoky bar to reach my table or the restroom. The stink quickly destroys the most delectable of meals."

Note that a week earlier, in a column headlined "In a World of Hazards, Worries Are Often Misplaced," Brody warned her readers that "too often, the risks people worry about are out of proportion to the actual dangers involved." As an example, she wrote that, "despite widespread belief and laboratory studies in rats that link pollution to breast cancer on Long Island, this month an \$8 million federal study found no evidence that environmental contamination from pesticides and industrial chemicals was responsible." She went on to explain: "A cardinal rule of toxicology is that the dose makes the poison."²⁵ Like many others, when it came to secondhand smoke, Jane Brody went AWOL from science. Thirty minutes of exposure to constituents of smoke so small they can't be measured can destroy your health.

The British Medical Journal (BMJ) in 2003 published a study conducted by two world-class epidemiologists, James Enstrom and Geoffrey Kabat, that put to bed—or should have—the received wisdom that passive smoke kills.²⁶ This study of 35,000 Californians showed that lifelong exposure to a husband's or wife's smoke produced no increased risk of coronary heart dis-

ease or lung cancer among the people who never smoked. It's one of the largest studies ever done, subjected to peer review and scrupulous editorial evaluation. And immediately condemned by the American Cancer Society, which, as it happened, had sponsored the original underlying survey and had, for many years, both funded and approved Enstrom's work.

The tale grows stranger. In ongoing surveys since the 1950s, ACS had studied over two million people, attempting to discover the effect of tobacco smoke—first and secondhand. The raw data never yielded a connection between secondhand smoke and lung cancer or heart disease. ACS didn't publish their findings but financed further explorations, including Enstrom's and Kabat's, until 1998, when it abruptly terminated funding because of their unacceptable thinking.

In order to complete his research, Enstrom turned to Philip Morris, with the proviso that the company not even see the study until publication. The *BMJ* story brought forth all the usual suspects, from the Cancer Society downward. "Just a Big Tobacco propaganda hit," they said, demanding that the *BMJ* run a front-page editorial denouncing itself. The *Times* never mentioned the report, or the attacks. One morning the paper printed a letter to the editor noting the *BMJ* study and *Times* readers could be forgiven for wondering what the author was talking about. The *BMJ* refused to retract, but they shook off a succeeding report by Enstrom and Kabat. The investigators turned to *Inhalation Toxicology*, a scientific journal that published their report after full peer review.²⁷

Is it too late for mere truth? Can sane voices and legitimate studies halt the rush of governments to impose ever more sweeping bans on smoking? Not if the current U.S. Surgeon General, Richard Carmona, has his way. Secondhand smoke kills 49,000 Americans a year, he reported in the summer of 2006. But his 700-page report reflected not one fresh study; it merely recycled decades of anti-smoking zealotry.²⁸

"Nothing but junk science," I was told by chest and vascular surgeon Robert Madden, MD, former president of the New York Cancer Society. The media bought the lies all over again—and neglected to tell the public that in 2003, Carmona asked Congress to outlaw tobacco.

Nothing more powerful than a lie whose time has come. ▼

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