

PO Box 6460
Roggebaai 8012
29 September 2005

Professor Peter Eagles
Chairman: Medicines Control Council
Per email.

Dear Professor Eagles

In your email yesterday, you asked me for my 'physical mailing address – I wish to send you a letter from the MCC'. It's not clear whether you have a letter for the Dr. Rath Health Foundation or for my Treatment Information Group, but the above address is good for both. That's because I wear two hats: I have a salaried position with the foundation here in Cape Town, but I also lead a voluntary association countrywide, the Treatment Information Group (TIG).

Speaking as chairman of the TIG now, I'm hoping that you might at long last be sending us a considered response to our ten letters, sent up to your MCC between June 2004 and January this year, drawing attention to the shocking research literature on how the foetal toxicity of AZT damages unborn and newly born children. You told me in your letter of 22 November last year that the MCC had engaged an 'independent expert' to consider the matter, yet nearly a year later we've heard nothing. Patience is a virtue, but this is getting ridiculous.

You'll have read in the newspapers that we're having some trouble with the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) in the matter of AZT's toxicity – a neutral common-place in any ordinary intellectual climate, but not here in South Africa since President Mbeki upset everyone by stating in Parliament on 28 October 1999: 'There ... exists a large volume of scientific literature alleging that, among other things, the toxicity of this drug [AZT] is such that it is in fact a danger to health. These are matters of great concern to the government as it would be irresponsible for us not to heed the dire warnings which medical researchers have been making.'

As we all know, saying this sort of thing is just not permitted in this country. This we discovered firsthand when, jointly with the Dr. Rath Health Foundation, we published a full-page article in the *Mail&Guardian* on 26 November last year, in which we said the following:

Hundreds of studies have found that AZT is profoundly toxic to all cells of the human body, and particularly to the blood cells of our immune system.

Numerous studies have found that children exposed to AZT in the womb suffer brain damage, neurological disorders, paralysis, spasticity, mental retardation, epilepsy, other serious diseases and early death.

This statement of unpleasant facts caused quite a fuss. The Treatment Action Campaign complained to the ASA that they were false, confusing and misleading. (Are you surprised, when it has an annual budget of R23 million to push AIDS drugs for the pharmaceutical industry? That's right: R23 million funding in the financial year ending February 2005, and no doubt a lot more this year, given the TAC's exponentially accelerating foreign funding curve, as the years go by.) The editor of the *Mail&Guardian* even apologized to readers for having published our statements, and promised never to do it again.

We responded to the complaint with two lever-arch files full of research data amply substantiating our statements. No, said the ASA, that wouldn't do; we're not interested in what hundreds and hundreds of research scientists and clinicians around the world have reported about the general cellular and foetal toxicity of AZT, we want just *one* to verify the claims. And on that basis, the ASA kicked our submission to touch, took no account of it, ruled that we hadn't substantiated our statements, and banned them. (And since our TIG's mission is to inform people about the deadly toxicity of AIDS drugs such as AZT, because the newspapers won't, this means that we're effectively a banned organization now. Just like in the good old days.) The ASA now requires us to withdraw our statements, as if they are false, in a full-page advertisement in which we solemnly recant them. Imagine that. Yes, in 2005. I attach a recent letter to the ASA about this crazy state of affairs for your possible interest; just skip past the first bit on an unrelated legal/technical issue.

To oblige the ASA we submitted an Expert Verification Statement by a senior medical academic and clinician, Professor Sam Mhlono of MEDUNSA (posted at the foot of our website: www.tig.org.za). Well, guess what: the ASA has just rejected it. Because he's previously expressed his strong opposition to ARVs and has endorsed the Dr. Rath Health Foundation's advocacy of nutritional therapy in AIDS, in accordance with his long-held professional views, he's not independent, they say. (He's not supposed to have any known independent professional opinions of his own; they disqualify him. Fantastic!)

We have a big problem now, because, lets face it, apart from Dr Tshabalala-Msimang and Professor Mhlono, no one else in the medical profession in our country has had the courage to utter these sorts of heresies publicly, and take the pain for them.

So we really need your help.

Would you confirm that our statements are true? We're sure that the ASA would be happy with that. *Introducing AZT*, which I've attached, is a primer citing a representative sample of research findings, interspersed with some scintillating statements by our country's leading AIDS experts and activists – to give both sides of the story, as it were. The annexure to our second letter to the MCC lists hundreds more citations and excerpts on the broad-ranging cellular toxicity of AZT (it's in the collection of our letters bound together in book form, *Poisoning our Children: AZT and nevirapine in pregnancy*,

posted online on our website). And you've seen my little book, *Debating AZT: Mbeki and the AIDS drug controversy*, also online, which reviews some of the research literature (as at November 2000) for non-expert readers. Apropos of our second statement about the foetal toxicity of AZT, you can find the grisly specifics on how children are permanently damaged by exposure to the drug *in utero* (sometimes fatally) in the published reports of Blanche and Barret *et al.*, among the reams of other research reports in this regard, reviewed in our sixth to tenth letters to your MCC. Since it's obviously important for someone in your position to be on top of the game, you can read the very latest reports on this score in *Introducing AZT*, including one published this very month on how AZT destroys foetal gut tissue.

Alternatively, if ARVs are not your thing and you've never heard about the harmful toxic effects of AZT set out in our banned statements, would you consider asking GlaxoSmithKline to confirm them? (Although, to be sure, they do have a history of telling the most shameless lies about AZT in our country, but then hey, business is business.)

Anyway, you'll undoubtedly agree that no honest person with any brains who's browsed the citations in *Introducing AZT*, just for a start, would seriously claim that our banned statements are actually contentious. So we're not actually asking you to provide an opinion in a dispute of contested medical knowledge; we're simply asking you to confirm that our statements comprise perfectly truthful claims of fact,

down to the stops and commas, having regard to the all the relevant research literature out there. We do appreciate that you might feel a bit awkward doing this, but we're sure you're the kind of guy who puts his public responsibilities ahead of worry about putting noses out of joint in the good ol' boy corporate/professional network.

Of course you'll keep in mind that it is mostly black, mostly poor African children who are in line to be crippled, thanks to your MCC's recommendation last year that doctors give AZT to their mothers during their pregnancies – not yours, or your friends'. (They'll be playing tennis, while the former sit rotting in their shacks.)

Would you do that for us? For the people of our country?

Yours sincerely

Adv Anthony Brink

Convener and National Chairman: TIG

www.tig.org.za

Cc per post:

President Thabo Mbeki

Dr Manto Tshabalala-Msimang: Minister of Health

Dr Kgalema Motlanthe: Secretary General, ANC

Dr Humphrey Zokufa: Registrar, MCC

Mervin King SC: Chairman, ASA

and posted online at www.tig.org.za