epidemiological studies,1,2 which were cited in my previous paper. Laboratory investigations have shown that benzene in vivo and hydroquinone (a benzene metabolite) in vitro alter the recruitment or stimulation of myeloid progenitor cells, thereby increasing the number of cells at risk of developing leukaemia. Furthermore, this effect is selective for myeloid cells only. Similarly, epidemiological cohort and case-control studies based on analyses of specific leukaemia cell types did not detect any increased risk of other leukaemia cell types in people exposed to benzene.1,3 None of the evidence from these laboratory or epidemiological investigations was considered by Savitz and Andrews.

In my paper1 I provided an account of why different leukaemia cell types were combined for analysis in some epidemiological studies in the past and why such an analysis would not be appropriate or meaningful given recent developments in laboratory research on the subject. In particular, I showed that ignoring the heterogeneity of leukaemia cell types would underestimate the risk of AML at high concentrations of benzene exposure. Although high exposures are uncommon in developed countries, in some parts of Asia and eastern Europe they have not been totally eliminated. Advocating an analysis that ignores the underlying biological mechanisms of the disease on one hand and underestimates the risk of occupational exposure on the other is a disservice to the workers.

OTTO WONG


Comment on EQM Testmate OP cholinesterase kit

Editor—We read with interest the report by London et al, on the EQM Testmate OP cholinesterase kit.1 We have previously reported good reproducibility of repeated measurements of butyrylcholinesterase activity by the kit under field conditions.2 The Pearson correlation coefficient for duplicate measurements on the 23 samples in that study was 0.93 (in a repeat 1937-1989. Regul Toxicol Pharmacol 1995;21:367-71.)

Figure 1 Temperature-adjusted plasma cholinesterase activities as a function of temperature, as measured by the EQM Testmate OP kit.

Figure 2 Temperature-adjusted plasma cholinesterase activities as a function of temperature, as measured by the EQM Testmate OP kit.