

Controlling Multiple Chemical Sensitivity

PART 1

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Supporting Research

Chemical injuries are increasing and in order for economic and ecologic impacts to be sustainable, measures for treatment and prevention must increase proportionally. “Based upon the increasing number of outbreaks of sick building syndrome, increased reporting of symptoms in contaminated communities to state health departments, increased recognition of problems in the industrial workplace, and the increasing numbers of physicians treating chemically related sensitivities, the existing evidence does suggest that chemical sensitivity is on the rise and could become a large problem with significant economic consequences related to the disablement of productive members of society.”¹ Natural indicators like air, water, and soil pollution cause public health alerts that warn people to stay inside, not to swim at the beach, not to drink the water, or not to plant a vegetable garden. Industrial accidents are moving from the plant into the streets like the 1998 chemical fire at the Plastimet factory in Hamilton. Improper use of pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers are driving more people to see doctors unable to diagnose, or improperly equipped to treat, the chemical injuries. Environmental, medical, and legal costs are rising while accident prevention, chemical containment, and help for the injured are reduced or withheld.

Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS) is a medical condition known to arise from chemical injury and can be distinguished as different from allergy or poisoning². Common to both treatment and medical research is “comprehensive environmental control”(p53) and that “The environmental unit is an essential tool” (p60). Therefore the design of personal environmental control (PEC) is required and includes selecting and combining the best available natural resources and technological material. Access to economic resources is essential to illness management and sustainable development. Unfortunately, narrow economic theory that may reduce access to funding for personal environmental control, ignores or aggravates the actual economic reality of persons with MCS who rely on income from part-time work, a pension, or social services. For example, in some cases MCS has progressed to the point where return to work outside the home is physically impossible or impractical because uncontrolled exposures aggravate the medical condition while commuting and in the workplace. In other cases where temporary control measures allow limited activity outside the home, work is at best part-time and uncontrolled exposures continue to increase the risk of further disability. However, this does not exclude planning and moving toward a better PEC and the possibility of some kind of return to work from home to overcome factors that tend to work against personal environmental control.

¹ Miller, Claudia S., Ashford, Nicholas, A. “Allergy and Multiple Chemical Sensitivity Distinguished”, Frank L. Mitchell ed. Multiple Chemical Sensitivity: A Scientific Overview. U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, ATSDR, Princeton Scientific Publishing 1995. (p 49) ISBN:0-911131-53-1(pbk)

² Ibid.

Regardless of economic limits, the ecological impacts of location, technology, and material are significant to environmental control. Economic and ecologic (eco/eco) relations help determine how comprehensive the control measures are, or can be. Whether to limit liability or enable relief from chemical exposure, describing the extent of eco/eco relations is important in order to move towards personal environmental control.

Valuing chemical injury

Chemical injury is a result of exposure to chemical(s). The underlying assumptions are that chemicals are present to the extent of injury; that treatment is required; there are monetary costs; and there is responsibility to pay. Chemical injury has acute or immediate and chronic or long-term results. It is the long-term result that presents the greatest economic challenge. Prospective employers would have to provide special environmental controls at work, tolerate more frequent sick leave, and shorter work hours. Furthermore, it is understandable why the characteristics of employers who do not guarantee work, or workers who do not guarantee attendance, make the situation of accommodating MCS in a workplace impractical. Unprepared for such economic stress, without work, the injured person is refused credit to pay for treatment and rehabilitation. Therefore the patient is homebound and unable to work for both economic and medical reasons. If a person with MCS is to recover from this type of economic hardship, it must take place in the home. Otherwise, the economic burden of support is left to social services or in some cases shared with a responsible employer.

The longer assistance is withheld, the more expensive the economic burden becomes. While the bureaucrat tries to fit assistance into a diminishing fiscal budget, PEC is withheld, risk of compounding injury increases, rehabilitation becomes less likely, health care costs rise, and legal liability grows proportional to violation of human rights. As the circumstances become more extreme, opposing objectives narrow, disregarding everything else for a singular interest; the bureaucrat's budget, the employer's profit margin, or the injured person's life. Politicians are left to put out the fires and uphold the ideal that justice is a noble value no less than respect for life, peace, humility, protection of the innocent, and preservation of law and order. How can there be some kind of reasonable balance between such contradictory values?

Covering or uncovering chemical injury promotes a process of deferred liability. Since help will be dispensed sooner or later, and experience indicates that later is far more expensive, then sooner is better. The bureaucrat at least has the authority to share the expense with some employers. The politician has the authority to make rules and guidelines more authoritative or less totalitarian. While the ideal of democracy prevails, the injured person is still entitled to protection of the law. So, where the result of bureaucratic, business, and political process is hardship and harm, every name on the record stands out as responsible for acts, or failure to act, within the law. While help is withheld, the injured person has no option but to seek legal remedy while a hope of social balance remains. If justice and peace are to prevail, private interest must eventually submit to public interest. Economic theory becomes deviant while private interest prevails over public interest and is expressed in the form of cruel or unusual circumstances of injury that includes avoidance of responsibility and help, and which in turn increases the economic burden of both society and injured persons.

Economic distress is in part due to theory not congruent with reality. While an employer, insurer, or bureaucrat may claim economic hardship if help is allowed, the fact that damage is done, repair is necessary, prevention is helpful, responsibility is essential to law and order,

the burden is only shifted to “social service” at “public expense”. Regardless of real or perceived liability or reduction of liability, reduced entitlement to help does not account for, or reduce, the reality of increasing injury and health care. If reduction of liability and economic impact is actually a fiscal, or business, or social goal, then it is reasonable to plan activity to actually reduce liability of all, not just some accounts. In other words, while litigation and controversy is the work being done, the indicators of unassigned responsibility, withheld measures of prevention and treatment, and in the end a result of help anyway, the net impact is increased liability. Fortunately the records of process list the parties who promote deviant economic behaviour and increase in liability. Unfortunately injured persons must tolerate, and where possible work toward, balance of contradiction and deviant conduct, without falling victim to yet another social disease.

Chemical injury does present some economic assets. The foremost is the ability to distinguish a difference between harmful and benign products and processes. Ecologically this increases the quality of choice for personal, social, and natural health. While established business may practice delivering material and processes at lower market costs without regard for human or natural health, there is no reason why durability, avoiding hidden or outright environmental damage, and reduction of health and social costs cannot compete for market share. This presents another reason to work towards long term sustainable development instead of deviant behaviour promoted by short-term monetary gains and deferred liability. Whether persons with MCS may be home bound or not, accommodation of special needs determine actual costs of injury. The reduction of health care and social burden can be reduced by any kind of rehabilitation project that helps turn liability into asset. In any event, the net result will displace faulty economic theory with more appropriate eco/eco relations.

Limiting liability

The economic liability of ordinary injury is limited by prompt medical attention, healing time, and return to work, at least in some capacity, as soon as possible. However, in the case of chemical injury, liability is increased. There is no environmental unit for treatment in Ontario and the Ontario Health Insurance Plan is unwilling to fund treatment elsewhere. In most cases of MCS, personal environmental control can be an effective measure to limit further injury, promote sufficient healing to return to some kind of work from home, and limit the extent of economic loss to both patient and society. Unfortunately, limited liability and movement toward help is undertaken for the most part by the sick who have few economic resources yet must do or die. Liability is entangled and frustrated by slow legal process and bureaucratic bungling. The patient is sick, disabled, unprepared, and without the economic resources to properly limit personal liability and therefore becomes a medical and economic liability to society while the disabling condition is left untreated or poorly treated. The employer is understandably too profit motivated to undertake any kind of limited liability by hiring such a person. The bureaucrat remains too inflexible to devise proactive solutions and instead reactively withholds help until some other authority orders action. The liability that could be limited is instead increased even more.

Every injury has its particular liabilities, but the present trend to increase liability of chemical injury by improper treatment or conduct, completely contradicts the idea to limit economic, ecological, and social harm. The irony is that the technology and knowledge to help the sick and reduce liability is here but for some reason is not being used. If a person is sick or injured and seeks help of a doctor what possible good can be produced by faulty or misrepresented

independent medical examination (IME) where the doctor may ignore or dismiss chemical injury and obscure the actual medical condition by diagnosing something else. Regardless of reason, or lack of it evident in such conduct, medical credibility is reduced where the basis for opinions differs for unconnected reasons. The difference is made greater when economic decisions are based on disputable or unqualified 'other conditions' offered by an IME instead of the attending specialist's report. Although prompting an increase in complaints to medical associations, it does not resolve the actual problem of how the IME is used; to qualify a medical report or to disqualify a claim. "When physicians are embattled, it is the patient who suffers" (p61) and this is compounded by legal and bureaucratic entanglement that follows.

Trading obscurantism for resolution

Confrontational approaches like suggesting the patient malingers or that IME opinion is faulty or incompetent does not change the fact that people with chemical injury need help and overall liability needs to be reduced. The most common argument that employers, lawyers, or insurers use to withhold help and promote controversy is to hide increases in liability by only showing short-term costs of help out of context with any other costs.

Controversy remains a product of obscurantism and may to some extent be technically correct but only serves to fuel greater economic liability, diminish credibility of doctors, lawyers, insurers, and still the issues must eventually be dealt with on their own particular merits. Therefore opinions that do not treat chemical injury with respect for what it is and are used to harm instead of help, produces a test for deviant economic theory and anti-social conduct. This type of conduct must be recognized for what it is, placed where it belongs, so that only the pertinent facts remain, and both economic and social liability is reduced and not increased. Unfortunately, in cases of chemical injury, until bureaucratic guidelines are adjusted to know and deal with improper conduct, and economic theory adjusted to limit instead of increase liability, it is left to the injured person to persist in complaint, claim, and litigation until deviant trends are reversed. The only consolation of this controversial scenario of society's weakest challenging its strongest, is the ideal of justice; may it prevail.

Economic impacts

The overall economic impact will be expensive for continuing instead of changing the practice of faulty economic theory and anti-social conduct. While bureaucratic entanglement may increase with responsibility, it is not a matter of if, but when damage control is applied. The resistance to law and order or its improper use that leads to aberrant economic and social behaviour will be reconciled at some point. Obscurant medical, legal, and bureaucratic practice must and will be held accountable or responsible in the process of uncovering what is being covered up; chemical injury and the help required limiting liability.

Knowing the actual costs of chemical injury, the options for limiting actual liability, and promoting eco/eco relations for sustainable development, are being realized as better tests and measures for uncovering obscurantism are applied. The scale of economic pressures created by vested interest in chemical manufacture and use are slowly being reduced by the fact that results cannot be covered up by words; they remain as a testament to reality.

Economic battles for control of money are in government, the market place, or courts of law. "The chemical industry will likely bitterly contest the reduced use of chemicals because it

stands to lose substantial sales. Compensation and liability insurance carriers also stand to lose if the environment is found problematic, rather than individual psychology, for example.”³ Litigation is a minor expense compared with the market impact of choosing wisely. Current trends to choose more durable, natural, and impact considerate products or services increases, as consumers become more aware of cradle to grave cycles. Selection is convenient and price important but, the reality of clean up cannot be overlooked. Trash is piling up, essential environmental services like air, water, and soil are polluted, chemical injury and health care are rising, government services reduced, and those who promote it are becoming easier to identify, boycott, sue, or vote out of power. The economic power of choice is available free to everyone regardless of health or income; choose wisely.

Ecological impacts

Assumptions underlying chemical injury include growth for conditions of injury and the health impacts to individuals, the public, and nature. MCS currently challenges economic and social values by holding up the deviations of stated ideals and facts to be examined publicly. The metaphor of people with MCS being like canaries in the mine lacks impact while the early warning signs are not heeded. If the miners did not get out when they saw the canaries die, they would die too. It is understandable that people who get sick, complain, and try to avoid injury, encounter psychological problems of depression associated with chronic illness and whatever else may develop from being shunned rather than helped by society. However, of even greater concern is the psychopathology of entire groups who can be characterized at least by deep denial of the preponderance of evidence and use whatever means available to bear the weight of society down upon the sick and suffering to harm instead of help.

There is a common denominator that links the economics of business, government, and people together, and that is money. In a nutshell, money is the phantom protagonist that pits person against person. Instead of a tool for help, money has turned people into tools that harm each other contrary to everything that is natural. Money has become a henchman's hood obscuring the view of immanent death from most people. The instrument of death is ecological not economic. Economics is a human development. Nature exists with or without humans and MCS is an ecological indicator that humans have reached a threshold of chemical tolerance or intolerance.

“Forests are shrinking, water tables are falling, soils are eroding, wetlands are disappearing, fisheries are collapsing, range lands are deteriorating, rivers are running dry, temperatures are rising, coral reefs are dying, and plant and animal species are disappearing”⁴ and waste that does not break down is accumulating. These natural indicators help to identify thresholds for sustainable yields and mark loss or dematerialization of natural resources. In other words, natural indicators monitor the carrying capacity of Earth and the impact of economic development on natural resources and ecosystems. This is a product of money influencing people to harm and calling it economic development.

³ Zeim, Grace E. Multiple Chemical Sensitivity: Treatment and Follow-up with avoidance and control of chemical exposures, Frank L. Mitchell ed. Multiple Chemical Sensitivity: A Scientific Overview. U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, ATSDR, Princeton Scientific Publishing, 1995. (Part II, p 85.) ISBN:0-911131-53-1 (pbk)

⁴ Brown, Lester R. “The future of Growth” (Chapter 1) Brown, Lester R., Christopher Flavin, Hilary French (dirs.) State of the World 1998. Worldwatch Institute, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1998. (pp. 3-20). ISBN: 0-393-31569-X (pbk)

Chemical injury is not exclusive to humans. Chemical engineering that produces the fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides used to increase productivity, also must be recognized as contributing to natural dematerialization. An important idea behind sustainable development is to reduce chemical injury to both people and nature. Nature's ecologic response to human action produces economic results humans must live with. For example the human waste stream that once was managed by nature is now at a threshold where the accumulation of waste is so great that nature is unable to recycle it in time to prevent chemical injury to humans through the food chain. Although nature does not take legal action, humans can, especially injured people who care to live and help others.

Eco/eco relations

Economic development requires ecologic and natural resources to exploit. A healthy garden produces more than a sick one. Sustainable development can be profitable. Healthy workers are more productive than sick ones. Chemical injury can be treated and prevented. Economic or ecologic profit or liability depends on how people use money, not how money uses people. The concepts here are not difficult. It is the deviant economic and social theory that needs to be changed if humans are to live and prosper.

Regardless of opinion or process, the need remains for persons with MCS to avoid chemical exposure, establish healing space, and reduce threats of the illness being aggravated or getting worse.

Although characteristics and circumstances of MCS may be unique to each individual, the measures of control have many common features. The following recommendations for PEC are determined by the particular needs of an individual with MCS. In order to be useful to anyone else with MCS, consultation with appropriate qualified specialists is required to analyze the PEC and make substitutions where necessary. Any unqualified use of this material is expressly and entirely at the users own risk. After all, PEC is "personal".

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.
— Edmund Burke