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Toxic Chemicals Found in Doctors and Nurses *New Biomonitoring Study Detects Four Chemicals on EPA's Recently Announced Top Priority List*

(Washington, DC) Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) in partnership with American Nurses Association (ANA) and Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) released the “**Hazardous Chemicals In Health Care**” report today, detailing the first investigation ever of chemicals found in the bodies of health care professionals. The inquiry found that all of the 20 participants had toxic chemicals associated with health care in their bodies. 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. These chemicals are all associated with chronic illness and physical disorders.

“The health care profession is asking whether we can reduce prevalence of disease by changing the way we manage chemicals. Nurses and doctors volunteered for this study because they believe it is their responsibility to better understand how chemicals impact human health,” explained **Kristen Welker-Hood, ScD, MSN, RN**, director of Environment and Health Programs, Physicians For Social Responsibility, co- principal investigator and a co-author of the report.

Other findings include:

- Eighteen of the same 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 EPA and associated with chronic illness such as cancer and endocrine malfunction

Twelve doctors and eight nurses, two in each of 10 states - Alaska, California, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oregon, and Washington - were tested for the presence of six major chemical types used in the health care setting that are associated with health problems and are pervasive in our environment.

“Simply put, we are being ‘polluted’ by exposure to chemicals used in health care. This study demonstrates the urgent need to find safer alternatives to toxic chemicals whenever possible; to demand adequate information on the health effects of chemicals; and to require manufacturers to fully disclose the potential risks of their products and their components, for the safety of both health care professionals and the communities we serve,” added **ANA President Rebecca M. Patton, MSN, RN, CNOR.**

The Hazardous Chemicals in Health Care report offers preliminary indicators of what the broader health care community may be experiencing. The project tested for 62 distinct chemicals in six categories: bisphenol A, mercury, perflourinated compounds, phthalates, polybrominated diphenyl ethers, and triclosan. 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.

Project participant **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 says, “I was tested for chemicals that have been associated with certain diseases whose incidences are on the rise. 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.”

Another participant **Dr. George Lundgren**, a family practice physician from Minneapolis Minnesota said upon learning his results “When you do find out some of the specific unnatural chemicals in your body it is hard to deny, minimize, rationalize or justify their presence. It is disturbing to know the only body I have is permanently contaminated.”

The Centers for Disease Control National Biomonitoring Project has found synthetic chemicals linked to health problems are present in every American. Overall, PSR’s test results were consistent with the findings by the CDC, with the exception of a specific type of toxic chemical, dimethyl phthalate, which was found at levels above the CDC’s 95th percentile. Future biomonitoring may illuminate a work source of exposure to dimethyl phthalate, which is used in insecticides, hair spray and other personal care items, rocket fuel and more.

“Our nation is experiencing an epidemic of chronic health problems, some of which clearly have links to chemicals in our environment,” stated **Anna Gilmore Hall**, executive director of Health Care Without Harm. “Reducing chemical exposures is an important primary prevention measure to help improve the health of our nation and the expense of providing health care.” Gilmore Hall wrote the study preface.

PSR, ANA and HCWH have joined the 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)

“Stronger laws are necessary to keep us safe from toxic chemicals. In 33 years, the EPA has tested for safety only 200 and banned only five of the more than 80,000 chemicals in commerce. We need to do better to protect public health,” says **Charlotte Brody, RN**, Health Care Without Harm Board Member, registered nurse, and National Field Director for Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families.

The report can be found here www.psr.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.

***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.*

***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.*

***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.*

Available for Interviews

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Resources

“Hazardous Chemicals In Health Care” report can be found www.psr.org

Health Care Without Harm www.noharm.org

American Nurses Association www.nursingworld.org

Safer Chemicals, Healthy Families www.saferchemicals.org

Environmental Protection Agency's Essential Principles for Reform of Chemicals Management Legislation

<http://www.epa.gov/oppt/existingchemicals/pubs/principles.html>

Senator Frank Lautenberg's 2008 Kid Safe Chemicals Act
<http://lautenberg.senate.gov/newsroom/record.cfm?id=298072>

Centers for Disease Control National Biomonitoring Program
<http://www.cdc.gov/biomonitoring/>