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Science & Education

23 May 2006

Dear Dr Lucas

Public awareness of the dangers associated with mobile phone use

Thank you for your letter dated 11 May 2006 to Dame Deirdre Hine regarding the dangers associated with mobile phone use. The BMA has long been involved in reviewing areas of interest in public health and maintains an influential role in forming public and government opinion on a range of health-related topics.

In 2001 the BMA Board of Science published an interim report, *Mobile phones and health* (BMA, 2001), that summarised current knowledge in this area, and outlined on-going and planned research.¹ The report noted that, although published reviews had found small physiological effects, there were no definite adverse health effects from mobile phones or their base stations. In light of these findings, the report recommended that a precautionary approach to mobile phones is adopted while research remains inconclusive. Following a number of research and policy developments since the 2001 report, the BMA published an update on mobile phones and health that concluded that the BMA's 2001 recommendation to adopt a precautionary approach to mobile phones was still valid.² The 2005 update highlighted two studies of significance including:

- a report from the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) that concluded that there is no hard evidence at present that the health of the public is being affected adversely by the use of mobile phones.³ The report also recommended a continued precautionary approach and further research on the possible health effects of mobile phone technologies
- a report from the independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation (AGNIR) examined the health effects of exposure to radiofrequency (RF) transmissions, including those associated with mobile telephone handsets and base stations.⁴ The report found that exposure levels from living near to mobile phone base stations are extremely low, and the overall evidence indicates that they are unlikely to pose a risk to health.

The BMA continues to support the ongoing national and international commitment to research into possible adverse effects of mobile phones and we will continue to maintain a watching brief in this area. The BMA believes that doctors have a key role in educating the public on the long-term health risks associated with their life-style choices; however, this must be supported by evidence-based research and policies. I would be interested to receive any further information you have on the evidence relating to the harmful effects of mobile phone use. It is important to note that the main proven adverse effect of the use

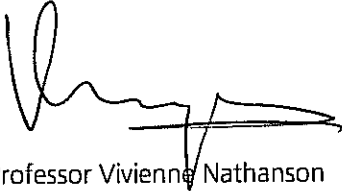
Chief Executive/Secretary: Tony Bourne



of mobile phones is the increased risk of road traffic accidents which can adversely affect pedestrians and cyclists as well as individuals travelling in motor vehicles.

I hope you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vivienne Nathanson', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Professor Vivienne Nathanson
Director of Professional Activities

¹ British Medical Association (2001) Mobile phones and health – an interim report. London: BMA.

² British Medical Association (2005) Mobile phones and health – an update. London: BMA.

³ National Radiological Protection Board (2005) Mobile Phones and Health 2004: Report by the NRPB. Oxon: NRPB.

⁴ National Radiological Protection Board (2003) Health effects from radiofrequency electromagnetic fields: report of an independent Advisory Group on Non-ionising Radiation. Chiltern: NRPB.