Cause-Specific Mortality in Cellular Telephone Users


This brief publication, which appeared as a letter to the editor, describes mortality data among users of first-generation cell phones. The data stem from a period when headsets were uncommon and radiofrequency exposures from handheld telephones were higher than in recent years. Cellular towers have become more prevalent, lowering the transmission energy requirement.

A previous paper by the same authors had reported that age-specific total mortality rates for users of handheld cell phones differed little from those of users of nonhandheld (car and bag) cell phones. This publication examines cause-specific mortality rates for handheld and nonhandheld cell phones. The nearly 300,000 cell phone users were identified from billing records of two large mobile telephone companies, and deaths were ascertained by linking the billing records with data from the National Death Index.

There was no indication of any effect of handheld cell phone use on the occurrence of cancer deaths, nor for any other category of disease-related deaths. There was, however, an association between handheld cell phone use and death from motor vehicle collisions. Specific data on how much of an individual’s cell phone use occurred while driving a vehicle was unavailable. As the measurement errors in driving-related telephone use were independent of the study outcome, a more accurate measure of telephone use while driving would have presumably shown an even stronger effect.

Link: http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/282/19/1814.2.extract