

The “Big Picture” Regarding the Rejection of Bill C-280

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Last year, Kirsty Duncan a Liberal MP from Toronto and a champion of persons with MS, introduced a private members bill entitled “An Act to establish a National Strategy for Chronic Cerebrospinal Venous Insufficiency (CCSVI)” and it was given the designation of Bill C-280. The content of the bill can be seen at <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&DocId=5127598&File=27> Basically the bill was an attempt to get the ball rolling on CCSVI research in Canada, a highly laudable and much needed goal.

Bill C-280 was voted upon by the Canadian Parliament and it was defeated by the @#%\$#@ Conservative MPs. Like anyone else who cares about persons with MS, I was very disappointed with this result. However, I must say I was not surprised by it. In fact, I would have been shocked if the bill had passed given all that has happened in the past 2 ½ years and especially what has transpired in the last two weeks before the vote.

First of all, the bill was a very positive one and was one that simply would have expedited the evaluation of the use of CCSVI treatment for persons with MS. Given the fact that for most of those with MS, disease progression and increased disability are constant, the need for CCSVI to be properly studied as soon as possible is obvious for anyone with an ounce of common sense and compassion.

The most impressive part of the defeat of Bill C-280 was the major, integrated effort exhibited by various power groups including the MS Society of Canada, MS neurologists, the Canadian Medical Association, and Conservative politicians with the Health Minister herself leading the charge. The big question becomes what was so bad about a bill that will help persons with MS by encouraging key research that all these power groups joined forces to ensure it did not pass.

Various individuals have offered their opinions on the defeat of the Bill and these include Dr Kirsty Duncan, who was the champion of the Bill (<http://sullivanweb.me/pdfdocs/Kirsty%20Duncan.pdf>), Anne Kingston, a Macleans magazine writer *par excellence* who has written numerous insightful articles on the CCSVI issue (<http://www2.macleans.ca/2012/02/29/the-medical-politics-behind-ccsvi-trials/>), and Christopher Alkenbrack who gave an excellent radio interview. All of these individuals, who care passionately for persons with MS, have made good points but, for one reason or another, they did not address the big picture which looms large above the defeat of the bill.

The big picture is rather obvious and one simply has to ask what do all the groups that banded together to ensure Bill C-280 passed into oblivion have in common. The answer to this question is that every last one of them receive money in one fashion or another from the pharmaceutical companies that amass billions of dollars in profits from MS drugs every year.

It is beyond question that most MS neurologists have received money or money-in-kind (e.g. free trips) from the MS drug companies. The MS Society of Canada receives major “donations” from the MS drug companies which also “sponsor” many of their activities. Pharmaceutical companies also contribute to the Canadian Medical Association in various ways through sponsorship of activities and buying advertising. Finally, the pharmaceutical companies also make political donations to the Conservative Party. Overall, the tentacles of the cash-rich pharmaceutical companies deeply penetrate all groups that have a say in MS treatment to ensure their products are the only ones recommended to MS patients.

It is also important to realize that the drug companies need to maintain such an overwhelming influence when it comes to how MS is treated because, as the current science demonstrates, the MS drugs do nothing to stop MS progression over the long run and that, at best, they reduce the number of attacks for some. If

the drugs actually were of real benefit and substantially helped persons with MS, the CCSVI issue would be of little consequence and CCSVI treatment would have been seen as simply a potential add-on to the drugs. That is, CCSVI treatment would not be of any interest to the drug companies.

However, because the drugs do not work and it appears that CCSVI treatment may well be of substantial benefit for the majority of those who undergo such a therapy, it is not hard to understand why the pharmaceutical companies see CCSVI treatment as a huge threat to their gargantuan profits from nearly worthless, MS drugs. And they are probably correct. If CCSVI treatment was readily available for persons newly diagnosed with MS, sales of MS drugs would very likely plummet and profits would evaporate. Ironically, this would greatly reduce government expenditures on MS but unfortunately drug company political donations ensure such a societal benefit will not be realized in the foreseeable future.

There can be little doubt that the pharmaceutical companies had to ensure that Bill C-280 was defeated. And this was not hard to for them to do. They simply had the various groups who enjoy the pharmaceutical largesse to do their part in beating back a bill which might help persons with MS but which unquestionably would potentially hurt the MS drug companies. So that is the “Big Picture” behind the demise of Bill C-280 and I have no doubt that future efforts to get proper CCSVI research going in Canada will meet a similar fate.

Overall, I don't blame the drug companies for wanting to protect their profits. However I have nothing but disgust and contempt for hypocritical organizations like the MS Society of Canada and the Canadian Medical Association that pretend to want to help people with MS but are really doing everything they can to help themselves and their benefactors, the MS drug companies. I have already voiced my complete lack of respect for the self-serving, MS neurologists who have blatantly sold out persons with MS for 30 pieces of silver.

When it comes to the Conservative Government, I was hoping for more from them but politicians will be politicians. With the government's heavy handed and callous crushing of Bill C-280, some people have gone as far as comparing the Harper Government to the Assad Government of Syria which is mercilessly slaughtering its citizens. I must clearly state that I cannot agree with such a harsh comparison even though the Harper Government's merciless killing of Bill C-280 may possibly indirectly result in numerous deaths of various Canadian citizens with MS.

In summary, various groups that receive financial contributions in one form or another from the manufacturers of MS drugs, including the MS Society of Canada, the Canadian Medical Association, MS Neurologists and the Conservative Party, all contributed to the defeat of Bill C-280, a bill which would have potentially harmed their benefactors. As I wrote 2 ½ years ago in my essay "Hope and Elation", "there are tens and possibly hundreds of billions of dollars at stake in the foreseeable future and the drug companies are not going to let that kind of serious cash simply disappear without a fight. It is impossible to predict how the companies will deal with this real threat to their bottom lines and stock prices but you know it is not going to be pretty."

The killing of Bill C-280 certainly was not pretty but was perfectly predictable. Persons with MS have to accept they are basically a herd of cash cows. All those making money from this herd, by way of drug sales and a "trickle-down" of the drug money, are going to ensure the money keeps flowing. It is going to be a long time, if ever, before any serious CCSVI research is done in Canada and it will be many years, if ever, before CCSVI becomes an accepted treatment for MS in Canada. The only potential winners from such research and treatment are those with MS. Unfortunately the potential losers (e.g. MSSC, neurologists) hold all the power when it comes to deciding where MS research money goes and they will continue to ensure CCSVI treatment remains marginalized.