

6 July, 2021

Dr. Rita Helfand  
Chair of the Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety  
Essential Medicines and Health Products  
World Health Organization  
20 Avenue Appia  
1211 Geneva 27  
Switzerland  
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Dear Dr. Helfand,

**OPEN LETTER: Request for GACVS transparency on members' conflicts of interest**

I am writing to you on behalf of Medwatcher Japan, an NGO that was launched in 1997 to monitor and prevent drug-induced disasters.

We have learned through the WHO website that Dr. Helen Petousis-Harris stepped down as Chair of the GACVS in August 2020 due to a conflict of interest.

In February 2014, Dr. Petousis-Harris gave a presentation at a Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW) public hearing on the HPV vaccine. She spoke against Dr. Shin Hang Lee's view that fragments of DNA remaining in the vaccine and bound to aluminum adjuvant could be dangerous.

However, information later disclosed through a Freedom of Information request in New Zealand revealed that her presentation was based on unhealthy discussions prior to the hearing between herself, Dr. Robert Pless, former Chair of the GACVS and a MHLW official. She admitted that she was not an expert on this issue, but cooperated with them anyway.

The unwarranted intervention of the GACVS in this public hearing raised serious concerns about the neutrality and fairness of the GACVS and the MHLW. Therefore, in 2016, we submitted an open letter to the MHLW on this issue.

<http://www.yakugai.gr.jp/en/topics/topic.php?id=929>

Later, we were very surprised to learn that Dr. Petousis-Harris was appointed to the GACVS committee and eventually succeeded Dr. Pless as Chair. So her sudden resignation by reason of conflict of interest caught our attention.

Amidst growing global interest in the efficacy and safety of not only HPV vaccines but also Covid-19 vaccines, it is important for the GACVS to be accountable and transparent on members' conflicts of interest, in order to ensure its credibility and that of the WHO's vaccine policy.

We therefore sincerely ask you to provide us and the public with specific details of Dr. Petousis-Harris's conflict of interest.

We await your prompt reply.

Yours Sincerely,

Ms. Masumi Minaguchi  
Secretary General, Medwatcher Japan  
Attorney at Law