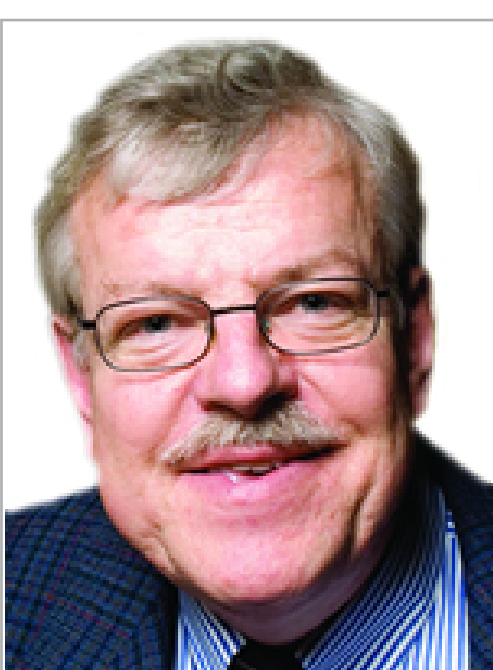




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THE WORK OF OLLE JOHANSSON



In the 1970s the newspaper industry was one of the first to supply its employees with computers. Complaints of visual problems and headaches, as well as clusters of miscarriages and birth defects in children born to female editors and other newspaper employees, generated some publicity. In the United States, then-Representative Al Gore held Congressional hearings in 1981 on the health effects of computer screens. In Sweden, a union activist brought the problem to the attention of Dr. Olle Johansson, a neuroscientist at the world-renowned Karolinska Institute. Johansson was the head of the Experimental Dermatology Unit at the Institute.

“For me,” said Johansson, “it was immediately clear that persons claiming skin reactions after having been exposed to computer screens very well could be reacting in a highly specific way and with a completely correct avoidance reaction, especially if the provocative agent was radiation and/or chemical emissions — just as you would do if you had been exposed to e.g. sun rays, X-rays, radioactivity or chemical odours.”

Johansson began to study the skin of these patients, and proved that they had a real skin condition that was provoked by sitting in front of a computer screen. The damage was similar to that caused by ultraviolet radiation from the sun. He also showed that the radiation from computers causes measurable changes even in the skin of “normal” people,” and also in the skin of laboratory animals.

He named the new disease “screen dermatitis.” However, since such individuals also usually complained of other symptoms, such as chest pain, memory loss, fatigue, insomnia, dizziness, nausea, and headache, the more general term “electromagnetic hypersensitivity” came into use.

Many people who worked in the electronics industry in Sweden, including an estimated 12% of the electrical engineers in that industry, became electrically sensitive, and helped form an organization called Föreningen för el-och bildskärmskadade (Association for the Electrosensitive), or FEB. Due in part to the work of FEB and the research of Dr. Johansson, electrosensitivity is a fully recognized disability in Sweden.

More recently, Johansson and his colleagues have conducted important epidemiological studies showing that wireless communication networks are causing significant illness throughout society. They have also shown that increased rates of asthma as well as certain types of cancer were strongly correlated with exposure to radio broadcasting during the twentieth century.



“The world may be moving inexorably,” Johansson warns, “toward one of those tragic moments that will lead historians to ask: Why did they not act in time?”

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