'French Paradox' May Still Be a Mystery -- Not Linked to Wine

By: Alex Cukan, United Press International

Resveratrol is not the answer to the so-called “French paradox,” in which low levels of heart disease occurred in those who have a diet high in cholesterol and saturated fat in France.

People who ate diets rich in resveratrol -- found in red wine, dark chocolate and berries -- did not live longer or have less risk of heart disease or cancer than those who ate lower levels of the antioxidant.

The study, published in JAMA Internal Medicine, found resveratrol was not the answer to the so-called "French paradox," in which low levels of heart disease occurred in those who have a diet high in cholesterol and saturated fat in France.

Study leader Dr. Richard D. Semba, a professor of ophthalmology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, said many had attributed the French Paradox to the regular consumption of resveratrol and other polyphenols found in red wine.

Semba is part of an international team of researchers who studied the effects of aging in a group of people who live in the Chianti region of Italy for 15 years. This study involved 783 people age 65 and older for metabolites of resveratrol in urine over a 24-hour period.

After factoring in for age and gender, the study found those with the highest concentration of resveratrol metabolites were no less likely to have died than those with no resveratrol found in their urine.

"The story of resveratrol turns out to be another case where you get a lot of hype about health benefits that doesn't stand the test of time," Semba said in a statement.

"The thinking was that certain foods are good for you because they contain resveratrol. We didn't find that at all."

However, Semba said studies showed drinking red wine and eating dark chocolate and berries reduced inflammation in some people and appeared to protect the heart.

"It's just that the benefits, if they are there, must come from other polyphenols or substances found in those foodstuffs," Semba said.

"These are complex foods, and all we really know from our study is that the benefits are probably not due to resveratrol."