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The Politics of Fluoridation

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Fluoridation was adopted more by politicking than by science according to Edward Groth III, Ph.D., Senior Scientist, with Consumers Union, publishers of the popular Consumers Reports magazine.

In a presentation made at the February 2001 Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Groth reported that, with three experimental fluoridation trials incomplete, enthusiastic fluoridation proponents successfully lobbied and persuaded the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) to endorse fluoridation in 1950 who, then with a few state dental officials, began vigorously promoting fluoridation with little, if any, scientific support.

And in a new devious twist, the American Dental Association, acting like teenage hackers, bought the domain name "www.fluoridealert.com" and .net" to deceive web surfers away from fluoridation opponents' website, www.fluoridealert.org

According to Groth, whose 1973 Stanford University doctoral dissertation partially evaluated the use of scientific information in fluoridation policy-making. "There were no significant studies examining the long-term health of people in communities with naturally fluoridated water. .. (However,) exposure via drinking water, at levels not much higher than what was proposed for fluoridation, had been associated in numerous published studies, beginning around 1940, with serious adverse skeletal and neuromuscular effects, in India and other countries. Opposition to fluoridation initially came from scientists concerned about the lack of good evidence on possible health risks," writes Groth

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In order to get fluoridation passed, proponents often belittled opponents and used slick public relations schemes, while refusing to debate the issue, to get fluoridation accepted, reports Groth. Something they still do today

Said Groth, "Those who did openly oppose fluoridation were often subject of personal attack

and professional reprisals. For decades, mainstream scientific journals would reject for publication any paper that did not articulate a strictly pro-fluoridation position on risk and benefit questions.”

“I myself had three manuscripts based on my doctoral dissertation rejected by U.S. public health journals in the 1970s,” says Groth. “My reviews of the evidence on risks and benefits of fluoridation were sent to anonymous pro-fluoridation referees, who found them “biased.” One editor advised that he wished to do nothing that might offer anti-fluoridationists any political leverage...(However,) I was politically outside the fray; my interest was exploring the interplay between political controversy and interpretations of scientific data. My papers were still rejected by several leading American journals in the 1970s, I believe because of a pervasive bias in favor of defending and promoting fluoridation,” writes Groth.

Groth reports of the early days of fluoridation, “Leading PHS dental researchers lobbied every leading scientific organization, to gain endorsements of fluoridation. They cast fluoridation as a product of scientific progress under siege from anti-scientific forces, and rallied the scientific community in political support of the measure. They carried out a few studies looking for possible adverse effects of fluoridation; the studies were poorly designed and inconclusive, by today’s standards, but they found no convincing evidence of harm. The PHS declared the issues closed, the debate over. The studies were roundly criticized as inadequate and biased by leading opponents of the day but fluoridation advocates rapidly took the stance that there was no longer any scientific doubt that fluoridation was safe and effective. Their political strategy was simply to steamroll the opposition, to insist that opponents had no basis for any valid objections. They focused on political campaigning, not on research; in fact, research all but halted, as it was politically inexpedient for the PHS to be studying questions they had already declared adequately answered.”

Times haven’t changed much from the early days of fluoridation as Groth reports it. Dentists still denigrate the opposition, fund huge billboards, radio and TV spots, newspaper ads, and brochures to influence Americans to vote for fluoridation. Organized dentistry often uses their clout to censor fluoridation opponent information from reaching the media, even when it is accurate, while refusing to publicly debate the issue knowing the media likes a controversy and mostly ignores opponents otherwise.

At the same time, some dentists admit the benefits vs. the risks of fluoridation is a legitimate scientific controversy. Fluoridation may be immoral and outdated argues David Locker, BDS, PhD, professor and director of the Community Dental Health Services Research Unit, Faculty of Dentistry, University of Toronto in the November 2001, Journal of the Canadian Dental Association.

And in a new devious twist, the American Dental Association, acting like teenage hackers, bought the domain name “www.fluoridealert.com” and “www.fluoridealert.net” to deceive web surfers away from fluoridation opponents’ website, <http://www.fluoridealert.org>, the website of the Fluoride Action Network, an international coalition of organizations opposed to fluoridation. Instead, with a slip of a “dot com,” unsuspecting web surfers are tricked to the American Dental Association’s pro-fluoridation information.

Why would dentists do such a thing? Dentistry was a maligned profession before fluoridation gave it respectability. And fluoridation birthed the National Institutes of Dental Research. Fluoridation gives organized dentistry political power as well as millions of federal tax dollars to study fluoride’s effects in humans. Many dentists are stuck in their old-time beliefs and haven’t actually read the literature themselves. Those that do often switch sides.

“Fluoridation campaigns provide a unique opportunity for dentistry to help reduce the incidence of dental disease while establishing political viability...” according to the Journal of the American Dental Association, “Fluoridation Election Victory: A Case Study for Dentistry in Effective Political Action,” April 1981.

Also, there’s an interesting “marriage” between organized dentistry and fluoride manufacturers who fund dental journals, dental schools, research, awards, symposiums and dental meetings, buy equipment, and do much more for dentists and their organizations.

Dentists censor negative fluoride information whenever they are able to. They discourage newspapers from using fluoridation opponent letters, encourage internet news services to shut-off fluoridation

opponents information while ignoring the misinformation disseminated by their own profession about fluoride and fluoridation on the internet and elsewhere.

A 1999 dental textbook, "Dentist, Dental Practice, and the Community," by prominent researchers and dental university professors, Burt and Eklund, reports that Groth's assessment is correct even today - that fluoridation is based more on unproved theories than scientific evidence. (See: "Fluoridation Based on Belief, Not Science, says Dentist Textbook")