

Fluoridation of Water

Sir,

I read with some dismay that the College has declared its support for mass fluoridation (February *Journal*, p. 111).

I wish to be dissociated from this support and want to know how and by what democratic means this decision was made. I certainly was not asked about it nor was I given the chance to express my views on the subject. Had the membership been able to do so then perhaps a more balanced view could have been obtained.

I accept that fluoride promotes healthy teeth (although less sugar in the diet has been shown to be even more beneficial) but this benefit decreases after the formative years. I therefore strongly object to being forced to swallow unnecessary fluoride via the water supply for a period of up to 60 years beyond that which is beneficial! With almost every brand of toothpaste advertising added fluoride, and fluoride tablets being readily available I find it astonishing that mass medication via the water supply is being advocated.

In all these matters I have yet to obtain a satisfactory answer to a frequently posed question: Since bromide is a halogen that replaces chloride in the brain to act as a tranquillizer, what evidence is there against fluoride acting in the same way?

Under the circumstances I find the College's blanket support utterly reprehensible and politically naive.

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Dr John Hasler, Honorary Secretary of Council has prepared the following reply to Dr Juby's letter:

Dr Juby raises two points—the first is the question of how the College reaches decisions, and the second is whether or not fluoride should be added to water supplies.

It is impossible in any democratic organization like the College for every member to be consulted when the Council or Officers take decisions. Indeed, it is only in relatively few instances that it is possible to consult with over 10,000 doctors. Council normally takes its decisions in the knowledge that it contains representatives from every faculty and that all of them have a chance to read the agenda and papers before the meeting.

On this occasion Council had before it a paper from the Research Division Executive, referring to a previous paper

prepared by the Royal College of Physicians which is considered to be one of the best studies. In the opinion of the Research Division Executive, the arguments in that paper were clear and unambiguous. They included the fact that fluoride at a level of approximately 1 mg per litre over the years of tooth formation substantially reduces dental caries, whereas tablets, drops and fluoridized salt have not been shown to be as effective. There is no evidence that fluoridation has had any harmful environmental effect. Furthermore many objectors to fluoridation appear to accept the regular addition of several other substances to drinking water such as copper sulphate, chlorine, aluminium and calcium.

It was in the light of these and other points that Council took the decision to support the fluoridation of water supplies.

Reference

Royal College of Physicians (1976). *Fluoride, Teeth and Health. Report of the Royal College of Physicians*. London: Pitman Medical.

Healthier Children—Thinking Prevention

Sir,

I am grateful to Professor Bain and his colleagues for recognizing the importance of the issues raised in the College document "Healthier Children—Thinking Prevention" and for responding with such thoughtful criticism (January *Journal*, p.55).

The members of the Working Party would agree that this is precisely the sort of debate we had hoped to encourage. I urge your readers to respond to Professor Bain's criticism with further contributions to your columns, and to discuss these issues in their Faculties and practices. However, a debate is not enough to bring about changes that will actually benefit children. Indeed there is a danger that we may once again present ourselves as a divided profession and that others will use this as an excuse to take no action. This in turn will lead to many children suffering unnecessarily.

I was delighted that Professor Bain ended his article by saying "the report raises many important issues and we would certainly support the views about immunization, reappraisal of the child care content of the MRCCP exam and the content of vocational training". Could I suggest that during our debates we emphasize the areas of agreement as well as those of disagreement, and that all of us keep an eye on the important issue of how the changes

that we can agree on can be implemented. We could start by taking one or two of the issues upon which we all agree and by using the influence of the College to put pressure on administrators to implement these changes.

Let us hope that Professor Bain's and others' contributions will help bring this about, for however learned the debate, unless changes are implemented, no children will be helped.

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Soviet "Treatment" in Psychiatric Hospitals

Sir,

Many members will have read with concern the letter written by Dr Anatoly Koryagin to *The Times* on 13 November 1981 and the article published in the *Lancet* (1981) revealing something of the extent of the debasement of medical ethics in Soviet psychiatry, and the brutal consequences to those of our Soviet psychiatric colleagues who have had the courage to protest.

That medical science should be prostituted in the cause of political harassment of dissidents who are men of conscience in a totalitarian state, and that those of our colleagues who refuse to be part of this process are languishing in labour camps for periods of 10 to 12 years should occasion protest from all doctors and professional bodies. Let there be no doubt, Soviet professional bodies are still sensitive about their image in the world community.

Amnesty International has shown how our protests can be practically channelled and has written to all British psychiatrists seeking their support. As general practitioners we practise psychiatry with ever increasing opportunities. Might I therefore invite those of our members who have not yet registered their support of our ethical principles to write to Amnesty International for details of how effective protests may be made, and of how we can send our moral support to doctors like Dr Koryagin? The address is: Amnesty International, British Section, Tower House, 8-14 Southampton Street, London WC2E 7HF.

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Reference

Koryagin, A. (1981). Unwilling patients. *Lancet*, 1, 821-824.