

Councils blackmailed?

Council officers at the Far North District Council have advised councillors that if they do not restart fluoridation in Kaikohe and Kaitaia that the Ministry of Health may refuse to give them future grants under the sewerage subsidy scheme. Does this sound like blackmail?

Does this explain why councils around the country continue this harmful practice, even though they know it does not reduce dental decay and there are many well-documented adverse health effects?

Is this the reason why Central Hawke's Bay District councillors chose to continue fluoridation in Waipukurau even though the majority of respondents to their survey said they didn't want it?

Fluoridation opponents have been bewildered for years as to what motivates councils to add toxic fluoride, a by-product of the phosphate fertiliser industry, to public drinking water.

The Far North District Council officers may have unwittingly let the cat out of the bag. Perhaps it's because the Ministry of Health is in the background, making thinly disguised threats of removing funding.

If this is not the case, the Ministry of Health needs to publicly state that it will not withdraw or withhold any future funding under the sewerage subsidy scheme to any council that chooses not to fluoridate.

Mary Byrne
Fluoride Action Network NZ, Petone

Failure on all fronts

Since submitting my letter 'Fluoride Costs' (Northland Age, February 2), the Northland District Health Board has responded to my official information requests on fluoridation in the Far North district. They have failed on all counts.

Information provided has revealed the following.

■ The NDHB holds "no information" that in developing its policy on fluoridation the stringently researched York Review was analysed, or in any subsequent review of that

policy that the key National Research Council's 'Fluoride in drinking water' report was referred to.

■ On a list of primary studies (not just literature reviews) which have been undertaken in fluoridated New Zealand communities in which the health effects of fluoride on other human bodily organs, apart from teeth, have been investigated, the NDHB blithely says that the studies relied upon are referenced in the Northland/Te Tai Tokerau report. In other words, they admit to ignoring current medical science on the wider health effects of fluoride in the body as there are no primary studies listed.

■ The NDHB is highly sensitive on the confidentiality of raw data for the Northland/Te Tai Tokerau survey, which was collected on the basis that no material that could personally identify a child would be used in any reports on the study, and that to ensure privacy and confidentiality all original documents would be numbered, and only this code number would identify all data collected from participants. The NDHB refuses to release the data and, they say the "... information was provided on a voluntary basis on the understanding that it would remain confidential." Everyone accepts that, but how release of coded data contravenes the ethics approval is beyond comprehension, and one wonders how the board justifies supplying similar data to the Ministry of Health for its regular openly published compilations on children's dental health.

■ In reply to the request for copies of the calibration guidelines applied and full instructions given to personnel involved in collecting raw data for the survey, the NDHB refers solely to the methodology of the (BASCD) Diagnostic Criteria for Caries Prevalence Surveys. However, the Northland/Te Tai Tokerau survey went beyond these guidelines in using X-rays as the clinical equipment, and diagnostic criteria in the BASCD document says that the diagnosis of the condition of tooth surfaces will be visual and that a blunt ball-ended probe (CPTN) with an end diameter of 0.5mm will be used only for the removal of debris or to assist in the detection of sealants.

These guidelines also say that a random sample of at least 250 subjects representative of the district study population should be examined, and should include a minimum of 15, and preferably 20 schools, and if there are less than 15 schools in any district all schools should be included. So how does this measure against just over 500 subjects in five surveyed areas, and why were Pompallier School in Kaitaia and the Kaikohe Christian School excluded from the survey?

■ Although water supply, ethnicity and school decile rating were included in the controls applied to variables within the surveyed groups, family income levels, individual socio-economic status, delayed eruption, diet, genetic influences, cultural and educational differences, parental oversight as well as the dental services available appear to have been ignored.

■ When asked what level of concern was held about the findings of several recent (named) studies reporting serious concerns about several health issues relating to fluoridated drinking water, the bland response was, "This request falls outside the parameters of the Official Information Act in that it asks Northland DHB for an opinion on another publication. You may wish to refer to the Ministry of Health's Guidelines on Fluoride for further information." I ask you! This is a district health board speaking?

The stated vision of the Northland District Health Board is to "Create opportunities for improving health and well-being, and promoting independence of all the people of Northland/Te Tai Tokerau."

The last way they will fulfil that admirable statement is to persuade the Far North District Council, against all available evidence, to restart fluoridation in Kaitaia and Kaikohe.

Ross Forbes
Kerikeri