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Fluoride claims criticised

Anti-fluoridation pamphlet links compound to lethal bone cancer

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AN anti-fluoride lobby group has been criticised for "misleading" claims linking bone cancer and fluoridated drinking water made in a pamphlet distributed in Dunedin.

The Advertising Standards Authority, in a decision released yesterday, ruled the Fluoride Action Network NZ (FANNZ) pamphlet made "unsubstantiated health claims" and used research results "in a manner which was misleading".

The group's pamphlet contained the heading: "Would you sacrifice your son's life to cancer because some people won't brush their teeth?"

Claims contained in the pamphlet included one stating there

was "an 85% chance" the death of a 17-year-old from bone cancer was caused by water fluoridation, and concluded: "Fluoridation — it's not worth the risk."

The pamphlet was distributed in Waitati, Warrington and Seaclyff ahead of two public meetings in February, prompting a complaint to the ASA by the New Zealand Dental Association.

Yesterday's decision found the pamphlet had breached rules governing the distinction between fact and opinion, misleading claims, research and social responsibility. It had also breached the ASA's code of ethics as it "played on fear".

NZDA executive director Dr David Crum said in a statement claims relating to the young boy's death "upset me the most".

Reviews of scientific evidence had consistently failed to find a connection between cancer and fluoridation, he said.

"This sort of misleading and false claim by anti-fluoridationists played on fear in a way that was appalling."

FANNZ national co-ordinator Mark Atkin, of Wellington, refused to respond to the complaint after questioning the ASA's jurisdiction.

The ruling was adjourned but later upheld after a second round of correspondence failed to obtain a response from Mr Atkin addressing the complaint.

However, in a statement yesterday, Mr Atkin claimed the ASA ruling was not a finding against his organisation —

merely a "default position" in the absence of a response to the complaint.

He accused the authority of "double standards" by allowing pro-fluoride groups to publish "factually incorrect information with impunity", and vowed his group would continue advertising in the same manner.

"FANNZ's position is that the reader of advertisement [sic] cannot be misled if the claims are true, as they are.

"The fact that we have not provided the [ASA] with verification does not affect the truthfulness of the statements."

Dr Drum said FANNZ's failure to respond "about sums up the robustness of the anti-fluoridation case".

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