Dear reader,

When I started writing this editorial, news broke of Michael Jackson’s death. Although I have never been a fan of the ‘King of Pop’, his passing perplexed me deeply. How could a man that was supposed to perform 50 concerts in London over the next six months suddenly die from cardiac arrest?

According to news reports, the possible cause of his death was incorrect administering or use of medications such as with Propofol, a strong anesthetic used in medical contexts such as intensive care units or surgeries. If a doctor facilitated such a medication for Jackson and it is found to have caused his death, he or she could be prosecuted for manslaughter.

Whatever the outcome of the ongoing investigation may be, this is a clear example of increasing unethical health care practices in the United States. Jackson, who despite being in severe debt, was still wealthy enough to afford any medical service, surgery or medications he desired. Over 50 million Americans still do not have access to health insurance. The world should mourn the 800,000 people that die of cardiovascular disease every year in the US; deaths which could often be prevented by the provision of adequate health care such as heart screenings and other preventative measures.

Fortunately, recent signs from the White House indicate that President Barack Obama is taking health care reform seriously and this time there is actually a chance that it could be done. However, what is shocking to me is the ongoing investigation may be.

I'm among the tens of thousands of parents who sent their children to receive orthodontic treatment from a dentist. My two oldest children went to their pediatric dentist to receive treatment. It wasn't until I started working with orthodontists that I learned the difference between a dentist who has “orthodontics” on their door and a specialist who is a practicing orthodontist. Now that I know, my two youngest children are being treated by an orthodontist.

Dear reader,

I have followed the amalgam debate for a long time. Dr Roland Svensson, President of the Swedish Dental Association, recently said that statistics show that the use of amalgam in the country has declined by 80 per cent since 1997. Therefore, he added, only 2 to 5 per cent of new fillings were made using amalgam in 2005. Amalgam is thus no longer a big issue for dentists in Sweden and Norway.

As a journalist specialised in politics and the environment, I have followed the amalgam debate for more than 50 years. Now, the use of amalgam has been prohibited in dental care in Sweden. As from 1 June 2009, its use in children and teenagers has been effectively banned, but amalgam can still be used in adult patients within hospital dental care. However, I would like to mention that the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare has decided to notify before treatment.

My country has been reducing the use of amalgam for a long time. Dr Roland Svensson, President of the Swedish Dental Association, recently said that statistics show that the use of amalgam in the country has declined by 80 per cent since 1997. Therefore, he added, only 2 to 5 per cent of new fillings were made using amalgam in 2005. Amalgam is thus no longer a big issue for dentists in Sweden and Norway.

It may be of interest to readers to note that the ban on amalgam is a recent issue. The Swedish politician Görel Thurdin was the first Minister for the Environment in the world to suggest a ban in 1997. Her suggestion was accepted by the Swedish parliament but she had to wait for 12 years before it passed EU administration.

Andreas Carlgren, who is the current Minister, said that the ban is a powerful example to other countries and a Swedish contribution to EU and UN aims to reduce mercury use and emissions. “Sweden is now leading the way in removing mercury and protecting the environment against mercury, which is non-degradable,” he said.

We need to understand that minimizing the use of amalgam that is necessary to protect the environment and our health. Unfortunately, there are still more than 70 tons of mercury within the EU. Brought into the ecosphere through dentistry each year. With the Swedish example, we finally know that dentistry without mercury is possible.

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