Flouride rich baby food under fire from scientists

NEW YORK, USA/LEIPZIG, Germany: Scientists in the US have warned of the risks of exposing young children to large amounts of flouride. In a study published in the October edition of the Journal of the American Dental Association they claim that an increased intake of the mineral from drinking water, dentifrice, infant powder products or beverages can lead to a higher risk of developing fluorosis, a condition that discolours and weakens teeth.

The findings confirm earlier evidence indicating a link between dental fluorosis and greater intake of fluoride in early life. The latest study, conducted by researchers from the University of Iowa in the United States, found that a greater fluoride intake from reconstituted powder, a popular choice for infant food in the US, and other beverages with added water increased fluorosis risk in children between the ages of three and nine months. They suggested avoiding the ingestion of additional flouride through consumption of these mixtures in order to reduce the prevalence of the condition nationwide.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, one-third of children between the ages of 12 to 15 years in the US suffer from some form of fluorosis. The country also has the highest occurrence of flouridated water in the world.

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Alaska study supports employment of dental therapists

NEW YORK, USA/LEIPZIG, Germany: Dental therapists can offer adequate dental health care to underserved populations, a US study has found. The two-year evaluation of a dental therapists programme in the state of Alaska supports the use of therapists to perform basic dental procedures, such as sealant placement and filling preparation, to overcome the significant shortage of dental professionals in rural areas.

Dental therapists routinely perform dentist tasks in many countries, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Sri Lanka. Montana and Alaska are the first US states to allow therapists to provide higher dental care. Therapists in Alaska have been performing basic surgical procedures under the supervision of dentists in remote native villages since 2005.

While Alaska has a sufficient number of dentists, according to US government statistics, it fails to provide adequate dental care to its widely scattered native population.

National and local dental associations in the US have criticised the study. A speaker of the American Dental Association said that the model has not sampled sufficient therapists to provide data that would justify the generalisation of the model to other states.

The organisation, which represents all dentists in the US, has long rejected the idea of permitting non-dentists to perform surgical procedures.

New evidence links mercury to Alzheimer’s

LEIPZIG, Germany: Dental patients with silver fillings are more likely to suffer from senile dementia of the Alzheimer’s type. In a review published in the latest Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease, researchers associated with universities in Boston (USA), Freiburg/Breisgau and Frankfurt (Oder), both in Germany, claim that symptoms of the condition were reproduced or accelerated when brain tissue was exposed to inorganic mercury, the main ingredient of amalgam.

Earlier studies of low-dose human exposure, such as to dentists and their staff, have shown that exposure to mercury is correlated with long-term neurological or psychological harm. The new review is one of the first that has found a systematic link between memory deficits and increased levels of mercury found in Alzheimer’s patients.

According to Prof. Harald Walach, Vardhana European University in Frankfurt (Oder), patients with silver fillings are exposed to 1 to 22 µg mercury per day, of which the majority accumulates in the brain. The metal binds with selenium, a substance responsible for preventing oxidative stress, which can lead to cell death and early ageing. Removing mercury from medical and ecological cycles could slow down cell death and prevent the development of dementia and possibly other forms of neurological disorders, including Parkinson, he added.

“The situation is similar to the early 1970s regarding smoking: substantial experimental evidence existed, but human studies were inconclusive at the time and were under attack by groups with a vested interest,” Prof. Walach told Dental Tribune Asia Pacific.

“To wait until irrefutable evidence has accumulated is not the best option in view of what we already know about the toxic potential of mercury.”

Amalgam is still the most common type of filling used by dentists worldwide. It is banned in Sweden and restricted in Norway and Denmark.

(Edited by Daniel Zimmermann, DTII)
Fewer US Americans have dental insurance benefits

Daniel Zimmermann
DTI

NEW YORK, USA/LEIPZIG, Germany: The recession is finally baring its teeth at dental patients in the US. The latest data released by the US National Association of Dental Plans (NADP) and dental service corporation Delta Dental Plans Association shows that almost ten million Americans lost or cancelled their dental insurance last year. The decrease is the first decline in dental benefit enrolment since 1994.

At the end of last year, slightly over 50 per cent of the US population or 166 million had some form of dental insurance and only one per cent had its benefits through individual policies. NADP representatives said that the 5.7 per cent dip in subscribers in some employee groups most likely reflects family financial constraints and layoffs. By contrast, enrolment from 2006 through 2008 grew in line with population growth holding steady at 57 per cent of the US population.

Unemployment in the country doubled in 2009, according to figures from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, putting more than five million people out of work. Latest figures released by the department forecast no significant improvement in 2010.

Currently, Americans with dental benefits have an average spending of US$1,000 per year at their disposal. Dentists’ groups in the US have criticised the system, which they say only benefits insurance companies and limits patients in accessing much-needed treatment.

Dentists in the UK show low morale

Lisa Townsend
DT UK

LONDON, UK: The British Dental Association (BDA) warned that growing bureaucracy is destroying the morale of high street dentists in England and could be driving experienced practitioners to retire early or leave the National Health Service (NHS). According to their research, excessive administration is the primary factor behind a downturn in dentists’ confidence.

Nearly half of all high street dentists are reporting that their morale has fallen during the past twelve months. More than 60 per cent of those said that growing administration was to blame. Rising expenses and continuing problems with the 2006 dental contract, including a lack of time to provide preventive care to patients, were also cited as major factors in the declining confidence of the profession.

Worryingly, more than ten per cent of dentists aged 55 and over are already leaving public service each year. The BDA is concerned that the registration of dental practices with the Care Quality Commission in 2011 could exacerbate the problems that are already being seen, and drive many dentists into early retirement limiting patients access to dental care.

John Milne, Chair of the BDA’s General Dental Practice Committee, commented: “Morale amongst family dentists in England is becoming a real problem. My fear is that many of our most experienced practitioners, the dentists that families have relied on for generations, could feel so wrapped up in red tape that they simply choose to walk away. That would be a disaster.”

“The Government is taking steps to address the problematic contract that was introduced in 2006 and we are looking forward to an announcement of how new arrangements will be developed. But it’s also clear that red tape is becoming a major issue, with CQC registration a real concern for dentists. If the new contract is to be a success the Government must look at this carefully, untangle the red tape and free dentists to do what they are trained for—care.”