Fluoride consultations take off

T he first of a series of public consultations, that could lead to 40 per cent of England’s water being fluoridated, has begun.

Southampton is just one of a number of areas in the country earmarked for fluoridation after the government changed the law making it easier for strategic health authorities to demand that water companies fluoridate water supplies if there is strong local support for doing this. Before that, water companies had the power to decide.

South Central Strategic Health Authority (SHA) launched the consultation for a water fluoridation scheme on Monday 8 September.

Dr Jeyanthi Lohn, consultant in dental public health, Southampton Primary Care Trust said: ‘We are very pleased that following research into the feasibility, safety and cost of water fluoridation, South Central SHA has decided to begin the public consultation on water fluoridation. Southampton City PCT believes water fluoridation is the most effective way of reducing the large numbers of tooth fillings and extractions currently needed by children in Southampton and will also improve the oral health of everyone locally drinking fluoridated water’.

The PCT claims if the level is topped up to one part of fluoride per million parts of water (1ppm), studies from around the world suggest that the average child is likely to have two fewer decayed teeth and that about 15 per cent more children would be totally free from tooth decay.

It also cites evidence from countries where the water has been fluoridated for more than 40 years, such as the United States and the Irish Republic, that suggests that adults benefit as well as children.

However anti-fluoride campaigners, UK Councils Against Fluoridation, claims it will mean one in eight children will grow up to experience discoloured or mottled teeth.

Tony Lees, dental adviser to UK Councils Against Fluoridation, said the most comprehensive study into the practice, the York Review, estimated 2.5 per cent of people in fluoridated areas would develop fluorosis. He claims it condemns one in eight of the population to a lifetime of paying for completely avoidable cosmetic dentistry.

Southampton City Primary Care Trust (PCT) claims most fluorosis is minor and many sufferers remain unaware of it.

‘Highly effective’ GDC

T he General Dental Council is a ‘highly effective and well managed regulator’ with a consistent focus on public protection and a commitment to continuous improvement, according to the health-care regulator watchdog.

The Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence, however, did express concern over the time it took to resolve fitness to practise cases.

Although the CHERE performance review of regulators did note that the GDC has put more resources into improving the 20 month average time between receipt of a complaint and final hearing.

‘It has set strong targets in this area and we are heartened by its belief they will be met during the next year,’ said the report.

GDC’s president Hew Mathewson welcomed the findings and said: ‘The GDC has implemented some major changes over the past couple of years to enhance patient protection. We’ve introduced registration for some 40,000 dental nurses and dental technicians and other professionals, enhanced our fitness to practise procedures, launched the Dental Complaints Service and rolled out continuous professional development requirements to the whole dental team.’

The consultation will run until December 19. A final decision will be made early next year.

Around 5.3 million people in Britain already drink fluoridated water, including people in Bingham and many parts of the West Midlands, Newcastle, Gateshead, parts of Northumberland, Durham, Cumbria, Cheshire, South Humber, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Bedfordshire.

Are you for or against more fluoridation?

Try emailing your views to: penny@dental-tribuneuk.com