

The Tables Are Turning on the Fluoridation Debate

Written by Todd McGreevy

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In the 1940s and '50s, print and TV ads depicted, of all things, doctors and professional athletes enjoying the soothing benefits of smoking cigarettes. One TV spot stated, "In a repeated national survey, doctors of all branches of medicine, doctors in all parts of the country, were asked, 'What cigarette do you smoke, doctor?' More doctors smoke Camels than any other cigarette" (RCReader.com/y/cigs).

Of course, since then we've all wised up and realized the absurdity of the message that cigarettes are a healthy habit. Under the premise of healthful living, in 1952 the City of Davenport contracted with the Iowa Water Company to add fluoride to the public water supply (RCReader.com/y/agreement). Sixty years later, it's time to wise up and realize the absurdity of this practice ... or at a minimum, with the benefit of scientific research, have a public debate about medicating the populace through the public water supply.

In December 2010, the *Reader* published a cover story titled "Don't Drink the Water? Author Paul Connett Wants People to Take a Fresh (or First) Look at Fluoridation" (RCReader.com/y/fluoride). This article explored Connett's book *The Case Against Fluoride* and how he hoped it would get people to consider fluoridation "beyond the endorsements of professional societies and public-health officials."

Managing Editor Jeff Ignatius wrote in this article: "While the provocative subtitle is *How Hazardous Waste Ended Up in Our Drinking Water & the Bad Science & Powerful Politics That Keep It There*, the book's primary concern is science. ... The simplest way to state the ... premise is that until better scientific studies can be done on the effects of fluoridation, the risks of health problems far outweigh the proven benefits, which *The Case Against Fluoride* says are negligible."

Quad Citians concerned about the health and well-being of all who must rely on the public water supply are fortunate that environmental toxicologist Connett will be speaking at two free public events, January 14 at the Bettendorf Public Library and January 15 at the Moline Public Library. Both events will begin at 6:30 p.m. and together will launch a public-awareness campaign being positioned by opponents of fluoridation as "Have the Debate." Connett will give a presentation

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on the first evening, while the second evening will be a debate forum at which proponents of fluoridation will have the opportunity to publicly prove Connett wrong.

In full disclosure, I believe the science is compelling enough to warrant ceasing medicating our populace, especially without the public's informed consent. And, even if you prefer medicating the populace, the materials used for fluoridation in the Quad Cities are not medical-grade; rather, they are industrial-grade, or toxic waste from fertilizer manufacturing. You may recall the incident that made national news in March 2011 when hazardous-material crews from multiple jurisdictions were called out to the Rock Island water-treatment plant to clean up the hydrofluorosilicic acid that had spilled and eaten its way through the concrete (RCReader.com/y/spill).

Meanwhile, the effort to “have the debate” about fluoridation is a reasonable, empirical, and high-minded civic approach to create awareness about what has heretofore been a “fringe” issue.

Fringe no longer, however. In November 2012, the citizens of Wichita, Kansas (population 300,000) voted overwhelmingly to cease fluoridation. In April 2011, Albuquerque, New Mexico (population 500,000) ceased fluoridation. Local populations have awakened and improved the healthfulness of their public water supplies by ending fluoridation in places including Fairbanks, Alaska; Pinellas County, Florida; O'Fallon Missouri; Napa, California; and Norfolk, Nebraska (RCReader.com/y/fluoride2).

Connett's book was co-authored by doctors James Beck and H.S. Micklem, providing the research and perspectives of a biologist, a chemist, and a physicist from Canada, Scotland, and the United States. Ignatius summed up the authors' three core arguments in the 2010 *Reader* article:

- “Fluoridation is bad medicine because it's a drug given to all without a doctor consultation, without informed consent, and without control over the amount of fluoride ingested. ...
- “There is little or no sound scientific evidence of fluoridation's effectiveness in preventing tooth decay. Further, current evidence suggests that fluoride primarily works topically (in toothpaste,

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for example) rather than systemically (administered through drinking water). ...

- “Fluoride administered through the public water supply might cause significant health problems. Connett and his co-authors argue that water fluoridation could have adverse health effects on the teeth (in the form of dental fluorosis), brain function (including lower IQ), the endocrine system (including the thyroid and pineal glands), bones, and kidneys.”

To date, there have been no takers to debate Connett on January 15. One of the world’s foremost published pro-fluoridation experts teaches at the University of Iowa, yet he has declined to participate. Dozens of local dentists have been made aware of this opportunity to publicly prove Connett wrong, but unfortunately none has yet stepped forward.

In one sense, this is good for opponents of fluoridation. But while the science presented may go unrefuted, the red tape and politics of local authority versus state authority will certainly be the next frontier for this campaign. The dangers of fluoridation impact nearly everyone living and working in Rock Island and Scott counties. If there were ever an opportunity to get involved in an issue that is decidedly nonpartisan and commonsensical, it is what we are drinking, cooking with, and bathing in every day.

It will be up to the people of the Quad Cities to engage their public officials, city managers, water commissioners, county supervisors, and city councils to also have the debate. I sincerely hope that Davenport native Joel Weber is enjoying some level of satisfaction with the worldwide awareness of the dangers of fluoridation finally taking root here at home. (According to the Fluoride Action Network that Connett directs, “The United States, which fluoridates over 70 percent of its water supplies, has more people drinking fluoridated water than the rest of the world combined.” [See a breakdown at RCReader.com/y/fluoride3 .]) For nearly two decades, Weber consistently lobbied dozens of city-council members (handing out meticulously crafted reports and speaking during public with business) to investigate the problems of fluoridation. Unfortunately, he was more often than not rudely dismissed by mayors and aldermen, at one point being labeled a liability for economic development if someone from afar saw him on a televised city-council meeting.

Ironically, the tables are turning, as cities and counties that have the debate and cease fluoridation can be considered beacons for development as healthful, livable communities – similar to having amenities such as public transportation, farmers’ markets, biking trails, and biking road lanes. If the science does point to more harm than good, then why in the world

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would bureaucrats and politicians – who purportedly work on your behalf – continue business as usual, 60 years later, without a debate?

It's one thing to complain about an issue, but an entirely different thing to engage in a meaningful way to do something about it. There are no excuses for not informing oneself and taking advantage of this opportunity to engage your family, friends, and public officials to have the debate about fluoridation. At a minimum, hear out Connett at one of the public-library settings on January 14 or 15.

More information is available at HaveTheDebate.com and FluorideAlert.org .