

**The Argument**  
**Against**  
**Fluoridating**  
**City Water**



BY GEORGE A. SWENDIMAN, D.D.S.

LONG AGO the philosopher Publius wisely pointed out: "There are some remedies worse than the disease."

Today, after four or five years of somewhat superficial, pseudo-scientific experimentation, dental associations strongly advocate the fluoridation of city water. We may well inquire as to whether any possible good effects of fluorine upon the teeth of our citizenry may not be outweighed by attendant "ills we know not of," whether, in short, our remedy may not be worse than our disease.

Let it be known at the outset that I am heartily in favor of any plan that will reduce dental caries and will, at the same time, improve the overall health of everyone. But I maintain that the long-term effects of fluorine in varying amounts upon the bones and vital organs of the human body have not been ascertained. Our information about fluorides is partial and incidental. We do know, for instance, that the fluorides are extremely corrosive and are used in etching glass. Fluorides also are used as a highly potent rat poison. Now these last uses may sound like splendid qualifications for a regular addition to our diet in the view of the dental association, but may I be pardoned for suspending

judgment. I do not crave rat poison, even well diluted. How do I know this poison will not have a cumulative effect? Suppose this diluted rat poison gradually ruins my kidneys and thus sends me to my grave? Will it be any comfort to me if my dental association says, "He died with perfect teeth"? As an American citizen, I crave to be treated neither as a rat nor as a guinea pig.

An excess of fluorides in drinking water has mottled the teeth in various American communities. Who will guarantee that if fluoride is diluted one part to a million of water, as advocated by Public Health officials, that it may not have some prolonged, insidious effect?

I have always urged that dentists consider their patients' general health as well as the conditions of their teeth. This advice applies particularly with respect to the fluorides. Operation Dental Caries may prove a success but Operation Vital Organs may be a failure.

**Condemns Synthetic Foods**

In my opinion, the dental association proposes to treat an effect rather than to eliminate a cause. The prime causes of tooth decay, as every dentist knows, are

candy, soft drinks, and refined foods. A courageous association would attack the consumption of these health-destroying foods, not just experiment with medicines to treat a symptom. Unfortunately, wealthy and powerful interests are engaged in the manufacture and sale of sweet, nutritionless foods. To attack these mighty interests requires idealism, imagination, integrity. Do our dental associations qualify?

As long as we are hanging out dirty linen, may I point out another fundamental inconsistency in the ideology of our associations? As a professional group, we have hitherto opposed socialistic practice in all its forms. Have we not fought socialized dentistry? Have we not objected strenuously to compulsory health insurance? Have we not denounced every effort that would compel the layman to accept volume dentistry and to submit to the service of a dentist whom he may not choose? Yet now we are sponsoring a program that will necessarily compel everyone from infant to grandfather to drink fluoridated water whether he wants it or not, whether it jeopardizes his life or not.

The fluorides are an experimental type of medicine. If a man individually, or at the behest of

***This is a detour to dental health. Why not attack and eliminate the underlying cause of dental caries?***

his family physician, decides that fluorides are for him—fine. Independent concerns can be found to supply fluoridated water to independent consumers, just as they now supply spring water in most cities. If the demand is there, the supply will be there. And the whole process will take place in the American way. Meanwhile, when I contract for water, I want water; I don't want any socialistic bureau to decide that some dubious medicine must be forced down my throat at the same time. If I shut my eyes to the fluorides this time, then next spring the social planners may decide that sulfur and molasses is good for most people, and I'll be forced to drink that in the city water, too.

#### Government Intervention

I say that fluoridation of city water is a subtle way to promote socialized dentistry. Many children who drink fluoridated water will continue to have caries, and their mothers will clamor for increasing degrees of government intervention. If the government is given further responsibility in prescribing for public health, that responsibility can lead to only one thing—yes, to socialized medicine. It is an axiom in our government that bureaus always expand; they never contract.

It is well known that a medicine rarely affects individual people in the same way. What cures one may be harmful for another. "*Quod ali cibus est aliis fiat acre venenum,*" as Lucretius wrote two thousand years ago: What is food to one may be fierce poison to others. Who then should prescribe for a patient? Should it not rightly be the individual dentist or physician? Is he not in the best position to know the physical condition of his patient?

Plainly, we can never fight socialism by fluoridating the city water. A better, more direct method of preventing and reducing dental caries exists. It is a natural way, too, and indisputably will improve the general health of our patients. If the American Dental Association is sincere in its concern about dental caries, if it honestly wishes to reduce the incidence of caries, let it take a tip from the numerous articles in dental journals identifying the causes of this malady peculiar to

our civilization. Let it study the eating habits of primitive men. In contrast to "civilized" people, primitive men had splendid teeth, perfectly-formed dental arches, sound bones, and well-formed bodies. Caries of teeth was virtually non-existent. The people ate nutritious natural foods—whole grains, vegetables, fruits, meat, cheese, nuts—because these things were available and they craved them. No juke-box joint stood on the corner to tempt them to buy candy bars and soft drinks. As a result, they prepared properly for parenthood and a vigorous adult life. Mothers had healthy, normal children, easily and naturally. And they suckled their young.

If we are going to compel people to do anything they may not want to do, why not compel them to refrain from consuming candy, cakes, cookies, and soft drinks? Why not prohibit, by suitable laws, the manufacture of refined sugar, refined flour, and similar devitaminized atrocities?

Why has the American Dental Association never inaugurated a crusade against the synthetic, devitalized foods that are undermining the health of our nation? Sure, some say, "It can't be done," or "It's too big a job," or "It will hurt some big business interests." But it *can* be done, if there is a will. It will be a tremendous job; yet our own association should be the spearhead. If we don't start the campaign, who else will? The milling interests? The taffy makers? The soft drink wholesalers? Let's not indulge in wishful thinking.

#### Nutrition Education Needed

Every dentist realizes that natural, nutritious foods promote good teeth and good health. He knows, too, that an excessive amount of carbohydrates is conducive to extensive caries of the teeth. He gets most of this information from dental journals which are filled to the gills with articles on this subject. Now, may I ask, "What good are these articles if they are not read by the laymen?" Do we have to keep convincing our own dentists that sweets are the real culprit; that synthetic foods do inestimably more harm than fluorides, bromides, or chlorides in our water will undo in a thousand years? No—we should

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save such ammunition for the laymen. For years the public has heard arguments for soft, white cake flour and creamy, crunchy candy; let us get on the ball and give that same public a counterblast of truth. Trust the people; they will recognize the truth if they only hear it once in a while. Let us stop trying to convince one another and start convincing the people. If some of the manufacturers and bakers and retailers get after us, we may get a few social or legal whacks to the jaw, so to speak, from the irate pressure groups; but in the main, we will feel good inside because we are fighting for the good of the American people, performing a service that needs to be done.

Too often we have felt that the school teacher was doing an adequate job of teaching dental information. The supposition is ridiculous. Most school teachers know little about dental health. They are trained to teach academic subjects. The unhealthy conditions found in the mouths of most *teachers* is a sure indication that they possess meager knowledge of dental health. Pamphlets placed in the schoolroom will not help, either. The continuing spread of caries among school children indicates that this method has made no appreciable improvement.

One thing will help. We, the members of the American Dental Association, can strike at the very roots of the problem. We can start treating causes, not effects. We can campaign for better systemic health through natural, nutritious foods. Perhaps the American Medical Association will combine with us in the campaign—it is as much their problem as it is our problem. But ultimately, of course, the whole thing is an American problem and all civic and national associations which are welfare-minded will cooperate. Still, let us not be too concerned with who will join us and who will not. Our mission is an excellent one—that is what matters. We see our duty and, if we are to preserve a clear conscience, we will perform it.

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**ORAL HYGIENE AWARD**

This article by GEORGE A. SWENDMAN, D.D.S., has won the \$100 ORAL HYGIENE award for the best feature published this month.