

Thursday Sep 15, 2011

DHB members seek fluoride policy review

A pro-fluoride policy of the Waikato District Health Board is to be reconsidered by some members who did not want to publicly endorse the DHB's stance.

A report into the policy was called for by board member Andrew Buckley who said there were no unequivocal statements of safety in favour of fluoridated water. Together with board member Ewan Wilson, he has urged for a review of the policy which was agreed several years ago by a previous board.

The matter came up at the board's monthly meeting when chief executive Craig Climo said he intended to write to councils in the region because he believed at least three of them were reconsidering current fluoridation practices. That included Hamilton City Council, which has fluoridated its water supply since 1966.

It comes two months after Ruapehu District Council decided to stop fluoridating its water supply to Taumarunui because it was introduced in the 1960s without extensive consultation. Ruapehu council also said it was not a health or dental organisation, it could not be guaranteed that fluoridation was 100 per cent safe, and that treatment of the water supply took away people's right to choose.

Yesterday Mr Climo said the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organisation supported fluoridated water as a cheap and effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay. But Mr Buckley said US professor Paul Connett's research in his book *The Case Against Fluoride* showed too many safety concerns and wanted a discussion on the DHB's policy.

Dr Connett's research, which he presented to Hamilton City Council in April this year, pointed to lower intelligence in people exposed to fluoride which

he described as an industrial grade waste product. Hamilton city waters manager Tim Harty said the council received 120 submissions on fluoride as part of its upcoming annual plan. The response prompted the council to signal an intention to publicly consult on the issue early next year as part of its 10-year plan process.

It costs Hamilton ratepayers \$40,000 a year to fluoridate the city's water supply. Mr Wilson, a Hamilton city councillor and who admitted he was profluoride, said he wanted the debate because the DHB had to follow correct processes. "The current resolution is asking this board to make a statement as to its position and I just want to make sure that we are going to debate

that issue. Because if in fact what we are saying is based on the Ministry of Health's position ... then I have an issue with that," Mr Wilson said.

But board deputy chairwoman Sally Christie said she did not believe the board should be re-debating policies every three years.

Mr Climo said he wished he had kept silent on the issue.

The DHB planned to write to all councils within the region to advise its position on fluoridated water, while members of a board committee would hear a new report on fluoridation.