

Ardent Advocate of Mercury-Free Dentistry Is Causing Heads to Turn in the Philadelphia Area

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Give a Kid a Smile Day, an initiative to give free dental care to underserved children, is not something Freya Koss of Wynnewood, PA, can smile about. Development Director of Consumers for Dental Choice, Koss finds disturbing elements in the initiative to bus disadvantaged children from ages 2 to 12 to state-subsidized clinics for free dental treatment and evaluation. She sees kids being exposed to the hazards of mercury fillings without the alternative options that more affluent, non-minority families have access to.

A survivor of mercury poisoning from dental fillings, Freya Koss reports that in 1998, seven days after having a mercury amalgam filling drilled out and replaced, she was struck with double vision and diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis, Lupus and Myasthenia Gravis. Six years later, after amalgam removal, she has regained her health and offers guidance to others as well as lobbying for mercury-free dentistry.

When the second annual Give a Kid a Smile Day was announced for February 6 of this year, Koss sent out press releases to area newspapers, exposing the American Dental Association's suppression of indicting facts about mercury fillings and the inequities born by unsuspecting families in minority communities.

Several newspapers carried Koss's message, which got the attention of station WGTW-TV Channel 48. Koss was invited, along with other proponents of mercury-free dentistry, to be interviewed by investigative journalist Catherine E. Pugh on "48 Update," which was aired April 15 and repeated on June 4. *The full text of Koss's press release can be found on the Consumers for Dental Choice web site: ToxicTeeth.org.* The web site also includes an op-ed article by Koss that appeared in the West Chester area's *Daily Local*, as well as a response by Dr. Himmelberger, an administrator of the dental program, calling Koss "Chicken Little."

Below are excerpts from the Consumers for Dental Choice press release regarding Give a Kid a Smile Day:

Although participating clinics do a commendable job serving the working poor year round, Consumers [for Dental Choice] was outraged to learn that the majority of dental fillings to be used [at Give a Kid a Smile Day] contain mercury, a known neurotoxin. Deceptively called "silver" fillings by the ADA and Pennsylvania Dental Association (PDA), these fillings are actually 50 percent MERCURY, the second most toxic non-radioactive element on the face of this earth besides plutonium.

Supportive of Consumers' concerns is the World Health Organization's 1991 report concluding that the primary source of mercury for the general population is exposure from dental amalgam. Also, the 1999 Toxicological Profile for Mercury by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) indicates that "children may have greater exposure and greater risks from mercury." Contrary to these reports, the ADA and PDA stand by their position that mercury fillings are safe, based solely on their 150 years use.

Admittedly, clinics and dentists treating [disadvantaged] children primarily use mercury amalgam because it is cheap, fast and cost effective. Although the ADA claims that the amount of mercury leaching from these fillings is minute, it's risky business treating children with a material deemed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to be a poison before use and a hazardous waste when discarded.

Alarmingly, the dental and medical communities chose not to acknowledge the significant neurological and neuro-behavioral health risks associated with fetal exposure to mercury from mercury in a pregnant woman's teeth. Mercury amalgams have never been classified nor tested for safety or efficacy by the Food & Drug Administration (FDA). Currently, due to widespread public concern and the pressure of Consumers, the FDA and National Institute of Health are overseeing a new scientific review of the possible health hazards of mercury dental amalgam fillings, based on scientific data submitted by consumers and scientists.

Patients of every socioeconomic status deserve to know the truth about dental materials and procedures, and to be given choice. You have a right to ask about treatment alternatives and be told, in language you can understand, the advantages and disadvantages of each. You have a right to ask your dentists to explain all the treatment options, regardless of cost.

Support Growing for Anti-Mercury Legislation in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Coalition for Mercury-Free Dentistry has recently been formed to bring about legislation in Pennsylvania that could lead to the elimination of a large portion of the state's environmental contamination from mercury. Spearheaded by Consumers for Dental Choice, based in Washington, DC with an office in Wynnewood, Pa., the Coalition already has support from the following environmental organizations: Clean Air Council, Clean Water, Penn Environment, The Sierra Club and DAMS (Dental Amalgam Mercury Syndrome), a non-profit support group. Others expressing an interest are: Greenpeace, The Green Party of Philadelphia, Action PA, Women's Health & Environmental Network, Student Environmental Action Coalition, Green Delaware and MindFreedom.

Among the Coalition's goals are:

- 1) Mandate that dentists install amalgam separators to control mercury refuse from their offices. Currently there is no legal requirement to dispose of dental mercury separately as toxic waste.
- 2) Allow low-income citizens -- especially children and pregnant women -- to have choices. Currently Medicaid will pay only for mercury fillings.
- 3) Mandate disclosures that amalgam (silver) fillings are 50 percent mercury.
- 4) Ultimately, to prohibit the use of mercury in dentistry.

Readers are invited to submit names of other organizations that might be interested in joining the Coalition. Contact Freya Koss at: 610-649-2606 or frekoss@aol.com.