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Opinion



The battle for fluoridation isn't over

Posted: Friday, Feb 3rd, 2012

BY: HUGO FERLITO and LAURA MARCUS

This week, following a 10-year battle to implement water fluoridation in Watsonville, the California Dental Association Foundation reluctantly announced it would withdraw the funds it had earmarked for the project.

This is a disappointing and unexpected development for proponents of fluoride, and more importantly, for low-income residents in our community who would directly benefit from a reduction in dental caries that results from drinking fluoridated water.

While the CDAF's withdrawal signals a setback for fluoride in the city of Watsonville, it does not take the issue off the table.

The problem is money. An engineering design firm retained by the city estimated Watsonville's fluoride project would cost \$1.6 million. However, through the public contract bidding process, the lowest construction bid was significantly higher at \$2.8 million, and this did not include the additional \$640,000 needed for electronic control programming and two years of operation and maintenance. Since the CDAF's agreement with the city was contingent upon the total estimated project costs not exceeding \$1.6 million, CDAF was forced to nullify the contract.

Despite this unexpected development, the CDAF and fluoride proponents in the community remain unconditionally supportive of community water fluoridation. Together we will continue to work diligently to identify funding for the Watsonville fluoridation project.

Community water fluoridation is proven to be the single most effective public health measure to prevent tooth decay and improve the oral health of residents. As providers of dental care to low-income and uninsured children and adults in our community, Dientes and Salud Para La Gente consider fluoride to be a vital component of good oral health. Community water fluoridation is the most effective and affordable public health measure Watsonville can take to improve outcomes for tens of thousands of Watsonville residents who lack an affordable source of dental care, and it has no proven negative impact on the rest of the population.

With this commitment, we also want to recognize and applaud the extraordinary efforts of Watsonville's community-based coalition of dedicated dental professionals, health care providers and public supporters who worked tirelessly to make fluoridation a reality. Thanks to their efforts and others throughout the state, 23.2 million Californians (62.5 percent) now receive the benefits of fluoridated water, compared to only 17 percent in 1992. Proven to be safe and effective, water



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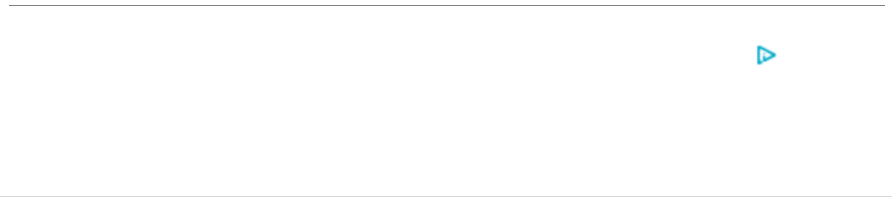
Many in Watsonville suffer from dental disease, and delayed water fluoridation makes it an especially sad day for the children of our community. Statewide data shows children in particular live in chronic pain, miss school and have difficulty learning due to untreated tooth decay.

Our local fluoride coalition, joined by the CDAF and many other state and national organizations, will continue to fight for community water fluoridation to prevent tooth decay and improve the oral health for the people of our community. Fluoride in Watsonville is delayed, but as long as dental disease is rampant in our community, it is not done.

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Hugo Ferlito, DDS, is associate dental director at Salud Para La Gente, and Laura Marcus is executive director of Dientes Community Dental Clinic.

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