

IN MEMORIAM

Philip R N Sutton

Philip R N Sutton DSc (Melbourne) FRACDS passed away in Melbourne on March 12, 1995, aged 80 years.

Dr Sutton was the leading Australian dental researcher to question the alleged scientific basis for fluoridation. In 1959, as a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Oral Medicine and Surgery, University of Melbourne, Dr Sutton published a landmark monograph, *Fluoridation: Errors and Omissions in Experimental Trials* (Melbourne University Press, Melbourne). This was a greatly expanded version of a paper published in 1958 by Dr Sutton and Sir Arthur Amies, then Dean of the Melbourne University Dental School. The monograph revealed in detail some of the serious deficiencies in the North American fluoridation 'trials' at Grand Rapids, Evanston, Brantford and Newburgh. In my view it is a substantial scientific analysis, carefully and rigorously done. It shows that the trials have major shortcomings, including limitations of data used, inconsistencies and errors in sampling, inadequacy of control populations, inappropriate 'weighting' of results, alterations to original results and misleading presentations and discussions of results.

Soon after publication of the monograph, the pro-fluoridation Australian Dental Association (ADA) sent copies to 'all of the men who are in charge of the experiment', asking them for comments. Then three hostile reviews were published in the *Australian Dental Journal* (February 1960) and one in the *New Zealand Dental Journal* (January 1960). Although the reviews contained serious and inaccurate accusations, it appears that Dr Sutton was not given the opportunity to reply in the journals concerned.

So, Dr Sutton brought out a second edition of his monograph (Melbourne University Press, 1960) which included the hostile reviews in full, together with his responses. To do this, he first had to overcome the obstacle that the plates of the first edition had been destroyed, counter to normal practice and counter to his wishes.

Dr Sutton's critique of the early fluoridation trials has stood the test of time. It is unfortunate that these inadequate trials are still cited in reports by pro-fluoridation health authorities and textbooks, without any citation of Dr Sutton's critique.

In 1985, Dr Sutton and I convened a scientific symposium on fluoridation at the annual conference of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS). This may well have been the first scientific symposium aiming to debate the issue of fluoridation in Australia. We invited two of the main proponents of fluoridation to participate: the ADA and the National Health and Medical Research Council. Both declined, and the ADA wrote to the organisers of the ANZAAS Conference questioning the motivations of the conveners of the symposium. Fortunately, this pressure was resisted and the symposium went ahead. As a result of the attempted suppression, the symposium gained very wide media coverage in Australia.

Although he was ostracised by many of his dental colleagues for his position on fluoridation, Dr Sutton stood firm, while remaining calm and polite to those who saw themselves as his opponents. He was a gentleman and scholar of high moral courage. He will be missed.

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In 1935, on his twenty-first birthday, Philip Sutton graduated with honours from the University of Melbourne, having completed the five-year course for the degree of Bachelor of Dental Science. He established a private dental practice in Brighton, Victoria, which he conducted for twenty-five years.

On the outbreak of war in 1939 he enlisted in the Australian Army, and later served with a medical team in North Borneo. Observations he made at that time formed the basis of a thesis for the University of Melbourne's higher research degree of Doctor of Dental Science.

After the war he also completed a university course in statistics, and later became chairman of the Biometric Society. He was a Foundation Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Dental Surgeons, and was elected to the Council of the Victorian branch of the Australian Dental Association.

In 1956 he was appointed a Senior Research Fellow of the University, and spent a year with his family on the island of Rarotonga, in the South Pacific, where he studied tooth abnormalities and related dietary factors.

On returning to Melbourne in 1957 he was requested by Sir Arthur Amies, Dean of the University's Dental Science Faculty, to check the published data and methods of the original North American fluoridation trials. This task led to the publication in 1959 of his famous monograph, *Fluoridation: Errors and Omissions in Experimental Trials*. It was aggressively attacked by fluoridationists at the time. But in 1991, over 30 years later, Australia's National Health and Medical Research Council admitted: "... the quality of the early intervention trials was generally poor." Numerous research papers were published by Philip Sutton, not all on the subject of fluoridation. His research interests were wide-ranging, and included studies on the relationship between mental stress and dental disease, the first appearing in *Nature* in 1962.

In 1964 he was appointed Senior Lecturer in Dental Science at the University, a position from which he resigned eleven years later to have more time for his Pacific Island and other research interests. In 1979 he published another book, *Fluoridation 1979: Scientific Criticisms and Fluoride Dangers*, and later, at Edinburgh, gave evidence before the inquiry into fluoridation in the High Court.

Philip was affectionately known around Australia, and was always available for discussions and advice. We convey our condolences to his daughters Katrina and Sari and son St John, and to his grandchildren of whom he spoke with great affection and pride. We are indebted to Philip's friend Glen S R Walker, of Brighton, Victoria, who supplied the above information.

Philip Sutton was a scholar of great integrity. He will be missed, not only in Australia, but in lands throughout the world. His work will not be forgotten.

ANNOUNCEMENT

THE XXIst CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR FLUORIDE RESEARCH WILL BE HELD IN HUNGARY IN AUGUST 1996

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