Figure 1. Key Elements In Reviewing Research

It is important to review information about fluoridation with a critical eye. Listed below are key elements to consider when reviewing information about fluoridation research.

1. **Credentials:** The author's background and credentials should reflect expertise in the area of research undertaken.

2. **Date:** The year of the publication should be apparent. The information should be relatively current, although well-designed studies can stand the test of time and scientific scrutiny. A review of existing literature can provide insight into whether the results of older studies have been superseded by subsequent studies.

3. **Accuracy:** If the information is a review of other studies, it should be accurate and representative of the original research. Information quoted directly from other sources should be quoted in its entirety.

4. **Statistical Methods:** The methods used to analyze the data should be generally accepted and appropriate.

5. **Comparability:** The research should be applicable to community water fluoridation and use an appropriate type and amount of fluoride. Many research projects investigate the use of fluoride at much higher levels than recommended for community water fluoridation. For example, the results of a study using a concentration of 125 parts per million (ppm) fluoride are not comparable to research findings regarding water fluoridated at 0.7 to 1.2 ppm.

6. **Type of Research:** How the research is conducted is relevant. Research conducted *in vitro* (outside the living body and in a laboratory environment) may not have the same results as research conducted *in vivo* (in a living human or other animal).

7. **Research Model:** A good study will try to replicate real life situations as close as possible. For example, results from animal studies using high doses of fluoride that are injected rather than provided in drinking water should be cautiously interpreted. Such studies are highly questionable as a predictor of the effects of human exposure to low concentrations of fluoride, such as those used to fluoridate water.

8. **Peer Review:** Publications presenting scientific information should be peer reviewed to help ensure that scientifically sound articles are published. Peer review involves evaluation and rating of the scientific and technical merit of an article by other qualified scientists.

9. **Weight of Evidence:** Conclusions from one particular study or one particular researcher should be weighed against the bulk of established, generally accepted, peer-reviewed science. No single study by itself is conclusive. If other researchers have not been able to replicate the results of a particular study or the work of one researcher, the results of that study or body of research should be viewed with some skepticism.

10. **Easily Accessible:** Reputable studies on fluoridation are typically published in peer-reviewed journals and other vehicles that are easily obtainable through a medical/dental library or through *PubMed*, a service of the National Library of Medicine which can be accessed via the Internet at http://www.nlm.nih.gov/.

Figure 7. Opposition Tactics

Targeting Politicians and Community Leaders

Antifluoridation Web sites contain draft letters to be sent to newspaper publishers, water departments, and community public officials warning them of their "liability" should they support or endorse water fluoridation. Leaders are urged to remain "neutral" and allow fluoridation decisions to be put to a public vote therefore relieving the leaders of any and all responsibility in the matter. Antifluoridationists use the time gained to conduct a public referendum to bombard the public with misinformation designed to turn public opinion against fluoridation.

Unproven Claims

Antifluoridationists have repeatedly claimed fluoridation causes an entire laundry list of human illnesses including AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, cancer, Down Syndrome, genetic damage, heart disease, lower intelligence, kidney disease and osteoporosis (hip factures). These allegations are often repeated so frequently during campaigns that the public assumes they must be true. Their appearance in print, even if only in letters to the editor of the local newspaper, reinforces the allegation's credibility. With just a small amount of doubt established, the opposition slogan, "If in doubt, vote it out," may ring true with voters.

Innuendo

The statement, "Fifty years ago physicians and dentists posed for cigarette ads," is an example of innuendo or, more specifically, guilt by association. Even though fluoridation is not mentioned, individuals are expected to make the connection that the medical community changed its position on smoking so it is possible health professionals are wrong about fluoridation, too.

Outdated Studies and Statements from "Experts"

Antifluoridation Web sites often offer a list of "respected medical professionals and scientists" who have spoken out against fluoridation. One of those often quoted is Dr. Charles Gordon Heyd who is noted to be a Past President of the American Medical Association (AMA). What is not disclosed is the source of the quote or that Dr. Heyd was President of the AMA in 1936 – almost ten years before water fluoridation trials began. His decades-old quote certainly does not represent the current AMA position of support for water fluoridation and is characteristic of antifluoridationists' use of items that are out of date. Additionally, antifluoridationists have claimed that fourteen Nobel Prize winners have "opposed or expressed reservations about fluoridation." It should be noted that the vast majority of these individuals were awarded their prizes from 1929 through 1958.

Statements Out of Context

One of the most repeated antifluoridation statements is, "Fluoride is a toxic chemical. Don't let them put it in our water." This statement ignores the scientific principle that toxicity is related to dosage and not just to exposure to a substance. Examples of other substances that can be harmful in the wrong amounts but beneficial in the correct amounts are salt, vitamins A and D, iron, iodine, aspirin and even water itself.

In another example, a press release from the New York State Coalition Opposed to Fluoridation (NYSCOF) posted on the Internet in August 2001, and again in March 2005, stated, "Fluoridation is based more on unproven theories than scientific evidence, according to a revised dental textbook by leaders in the field." The press release also includes a number of items "quoted" from the textbook. The American Dental Association contacted the textbook authors who immediately wrote a letter responding to the press release. Drs. Brian A. Burt and Dr. Stephen A. Eklund responded, "The NYSCOF article takes a series of disconnected quotes from our textbook (Burt BA, Eklund SE. The Dentist, Dental Practice, and the Community 5th edition. Philadelphia: Saunders, 1999) and puts its own interpretation on them. The result is to portray Drs. Burt and Eklund as being opposed to fluoridation, which is most definitely not the case."

Moving Targets

In venues ranging from the media to the courts, opponents have been known to shift their theories of opposition frequently and mid-stream. This often appears to occur when one of their originally advanced points of opposition has been unveiled as being without merit. Some examples: A parent who told the media that he would need to move his family out of town because of past allergies to fluoride had to change his position after it was disclosed that the family had previously lived in a fluoridated community; and opponents filing repeated amendments to their legal complaints, in one case moving from an all out attack to the position that that they are not opposed to fluoridation, but just to one particular chemical - without telling the court that the chemical has been safely and extensively used for decades.

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