

THE FLUORIDATION OF DRINKING WATER (DWF) IN THE NETHERLANDS 1950-1980

A historical perspective

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Introduction

In 1953 the Dutch scientific research institute TNO (brief for: *Nederlandse Organisatie voor toegepast-natuurwetenschappelijk onderzoek TNO*) started a long term clinical trial on the caries reduction through fluoridation of drinking water in the cities of Tiel and Culemborg (control group). Already in 1960 TNO concluded that fluoridation of drinking water by 1 till 1.2 ppm helps reducing a considerable amount of dental caries. According to the Dutch Health Council (Gezondheidsraad) dwf should therefore be implemented on a national scale.

Material & Methods

The different publications of the so-called historical actors, i.e. the opponents and the advocates of dwf, in the process of the failed introduction of dwf in the Netherlands are being analyzed. At first, The Dutch Health Council published several reports during the different stages of the introduction of dwf; in 1960/ 1963/ 1970/ 1973. Secondly, there was an extensive collection articles from local and national newspapers reporting about the dwf between 1950 and 1980. Thirdly, there were several writings from opponents and advocates of the dwf in the archives of Tiel-Culemborg and the documents of the Dutch Health Council in the National Archive at The Hague.

Results

The reports, articles and writings show how opponents of dwf caused increasing doubts among the public, administrators and politicians. The arguments in the publications of the opponents aroused so much doubt that the scientific based reports of the advocates of the dwf were not convincing enough any more. There can be seen a difference between opponents and advocates in the polemic debate about dwf. On the one hand there can be noticed in the archives a huge amount articles from very different kind of opponents. On the other hand the population of advocates were mostly professionals and scientists involved with the clinical trial of Tiel-Culemborg. In the sixties/seventies the discussion was more focused around the concept of freedom and health risks than the beneficial effect on reducing caries.



The fluoridation installation to add fluoride to the drinking water supply at the city of Tiel.

Conclusions

There was a small group of people in the Netherlands who revolted against fluoridation of drinking water. The opponents were successful in stopping fluoridation; they succeeded in 1973 to force the Supreme Court of The Netherlands for a judgment on the dwf-case. According to the Court there was no legal basis for fluoridation and therefore the parliament had to provide a national law to legitimize the fluoridation practice in The Netherlands. In the parliament was no support to legitimize dwf (1976). The result of the fight for fluoridation was an improved *dental awareness* among the dental patients. Although the dwf was stopped in The Netherlands the people eventually did brush their teeth more often, in a better way and with fluoridated toothpaste. Above all, after thirty years (1950-1980) of polemic debate about the (failed) introduction of dwf dental caries became considered, for the first time in Dutch History, as a disease that needs public health measurements. Not only the public but also the administrators became aware of the ways people can protect their teeth. Prevention and dental health became a political topic.

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