Christopher H. Fox

The adoption of the Minamata Convention in Japan recently made way for banning mercury-containing products on a world-wide scale. Provision was also made for phasing down the use of and trade in dental amalgam.

Christopher H. Fox, who attended four of the intergovernmental negotiating committee sessions on behalf of the dental profession, about the impact this could have on dentistry and the future of dental amalgam as a restorative dental material.

DTE: The recently adopted Minamata Convention on Mercury includes provisions on phasing down dental amalgam on a global scale. What impact do you think this will have on the dental community and particularly restorative dentistry in the long run?

Christopher Fox: I think it must be first pointed out that the Minamata Convention is a very broad treaty designed to reduce all use of and international trade in mercury, as well as the demand for mercury in products and processes. In addition, it is intended to address the need for the reduction of atmospheric emissions of mercury, as well as mercury releases on land and in water.

Dental amalgam is included in the treaty as a mercury-added product contributing to the global demand for mercury. In this regard, it is important to note that the treaty calls for phasing down the use of dental amalgam, as opposed to banning the use of it. This will give the industry and profession time to make a transition and preserve restorative choices for our profession and patients.

One of the provisions for phasing down amalgam is for countries to set national objectives aimed at dental caries prevention and health promotion, thereby minimising the need for any dental restoration. A greater emphasis on prevention and health promotion is indeed welcome and will provide the greatest benefit to populations.

Another provision promotes research and development of alternative restorative material. This, in turn, could improve dental restoration, in particular, will have improved dental restorative materials from which to choose for their patients.

“Reach a point where dental restorative materials are rare for everybody”

An interview with Christopher H. Fox, Executive Director of the International Association for Dental Research

The symposium at the recent FDI Annual World Dental Congress in Istanbul was actually a much-condensed summary of a two-day workshop held in December 2012 at King’s College London. In brief, yes, we can have much-improved, innovative dental restorative materials, but it is going to take a significant commitment from government funders, academia and industry. Keep in mind that even if a new material could be developed within a one- or two-year time frame, clinical safety and effectiveness trials and regulatory approvals will take significantly more time. Practising dentists have an important role here too, as they can participate in research networks evaluating new materials and identify research questions, not to mention advocating for research funding with policymakers in their country.

For a more complete answer to your question, I would refer your readers to the proceedings, which have just been published in the November issue of the Advances in Dental Research, an e-supplement to the Journal of Dental Research.

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Dental Tribune Asia Pacific Edition

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