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DEBATE OVER CHILD AMALGAM USE

A recent journal published by the Academy of General Dentistry highlighted two studies supported by the National Institutes of Health and published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concerning the use of dental amalgam in children. Although the study found no statistically significant effects of cognitive or renal function in children, multiple groups have questioned the validity of the studies.

According to Herbert L. Needleman, MD, a professor of child psychiatry and pediatrics at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, “the question of the ‘more subtle’ effects of amalgam remains open. The study did not address effects that may have occurred in vulnerable subgroups, such as those with a genetic vulnerability to Mercury poisoning and did

not follow participants into adulthood. The results of the studies should not be interpreted as declaring amalgam risk-free.”

Boyd Haley, PhD, a professor of chemistry at the University of Kentucky, questions that the “level of mercury in blood, urine or feces may be more a factor of the ability of the child to excrete mercury than it is of total mercury exposure.” Apparently, the studies published only measured urine samples which do not accurately represent total mercury exposure.

The International Academy of Oral Medicine and Toxicology (IAOMT) claims that “the researchers failed to obtain informed consent, since children and their parents were not adequately warned that mercury is suspected in autism, long-term neurological damage and Alzheimer’s disease, or that as much as 25% of the population is genetically predisposed to greater damage.” The IAOMT also suggested that “the studies were ‘designed to fail’ in detecting health problems, which take much longer manifest than the life of the studies.”

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other groups are planning to meet, review and discuss peer-reviewed scientific literature on dental amalgam and its potential mercury toxicity, specifically as it relates to neurotoxic effects.

The whole amalgam controversy still boggles my mind, and I’m a dentist. How is the public supposed to make anything of it? The fact remains, as with anything

relating to health issues, peer-reviewed scientific documents are the main source of information we should focus on. The controversy has been going on for so long I tend to wonder if anything will ever change. My theory is: If there is an alternative out there that doesn’t come with controversy, why not use that?

If there are certain topics you would like to see written about or questions you have please email them to me at jpstclair@dentalhealthforlife.com.

