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## Debate over?

### Dentists won't be participating in final two debates

Bob Vrbanac, Chronicle Staff

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Something will be missing from the final two water fluoride forums in Waterloo — the dentists representing the pro side of the debate.

"We think the debate is over and we're not participating in it," said Dr. Harry Hoediono, the president elect of the Ontario Dental Association. "We were asked to provide scientific information and we did do that."

A total of three community debates were proposed in the lead-up to the Oct. 25 plebiscite question that will ask the public: "Should the Region of Waterloo fluoridate your municipal water? Yes or No."

The first one came in June and featured Dr. Ira Kershin, past president of the ODA, and Hoediono, a local dentist, who defended the practice first started in Waterloo in 1967.

They were initially challenged by Paul Connett, a PhD in chemistry who heads the Fluoride Action Network out of the U. S., and Peter Van Caulart, who trains water operators in Ontario.

While there was no clear winner of the first debate, Hoediono said the Ontario Dental Association doesn't really think there is a debate at all, with the bulk of scientific studies and organizations around the world endorsing the practice of water fluoridation.

"We never really wanted to treat this as a debate because the scientific community as a whole — scientists who are credentialed, screened and peer reviewed — there really is no debate on fluoride," said Hoediono.

That didn't sit well with Robert Fleming, executive director of WaterlooWatch, who has been trying to line up his own experts and participants for this week's debate and was frustrated that it might not even happen.

"The Ontario Dental Association has more than 8,000 members and they can't come up with at least two people who can come to the debate," he said.

"That tells me that the dentists aren't quite as happy with discussing water fluoridation when it comes to finding someone in their ranks who can actually speak in promotion of it."

The Waterloo Wellington Dental Society will be holding its own information session on water fluoridation Oct. 21 at RIM Park featuring Dr. Peter Cooney, chief dental officer with Health Canada, moderated by Dr. Rick Beyers, a retired local dentist heavily involved during the fluoride plebiscites in the early 1980s.

Hoediono said the Ontario Dental Association would not be actively campaigning during the municipal election, although Frank Berilacqua registered just before Friday's cut off as a representative of the Ontario Dental Association.

"We will be strictly providing information," he said.

"And we will be supporting our local members if they need material to get accurate information out to the public. I think what we want to do more than anything else is not convince individuals, we want to provide information for them so they can see the science."

While local dentists won't be participating at the next debate, slated for Sept. 16, 7 p. m., in Room 200 at the Waterloo Memorial Recreation Complex, those forums will continue under the stewardship of a group called Wonderful Waterloo.

The online community group that discusses urban issues was asked by the City of Waterloo to act as a neutral third party and took over organizing the debates.

Andrew Hilliard, a spokesperson for the group, said they've tried to get in contact with everyone from Health Canada to local dentists to participate in the debates but they didn't get any takers.

"Some didn't return my calls while others flat out declined," said Hilliard.

There was some question whether those debates would go forward without the participation of advocates for water fluoridation, but Hilliard has rented the room himself and will continue to provide the venue for people to attend and ask questions.

And groups like WaterlooWatch who are actively fighting to stop hydrofluorosilicic acid from being added to the water still plan to attend and answer any questions posed by the audience.

"We're set to go," said Fleming. "The only reason we're going through these gyrations is that the two dentist who previously promised they would be back for the second and third debate have apparently reneged."

Hilliard said anyone who supports the practice is still encouraged to come out and tell that side of the story.

In the meantime he's looking for participants for the Oct. 7 debate. To participate, send an e-mail to him at [contact@wonderfulwaterloo.com](mailto:contact@wonderfulwaterloo.com). "This is still a neutral forum, and anyone who wants to can participate," said Hilliard, who has picked up the costs of the rental.

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