THE UNIVERSITY of York

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH SCIENCES
Area 2 1st Floor
Seebohm Rowntree Building
Heslington
York YO10 5DD

Direct line (01904) 321300
Fax (01904) 321722
Email tas5@york.ac.uk

Professor Trevor A Sheldon
Pro-Vice-Chancellor: Learning & Teaching

9/10/04

To whom it may concern

In my capacity of chair of the Advisory Group for the systematic review on the effects of water fluoridation conducted by the NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination the University of York and as its founding director, I am concerned that the results of the review have been widely misrepresented. The review was exceptional in this field in that it was conducted by an independent group to the highest international scientific standards and a summary has been published in the British Medical Journal. It is particularly worrying then that statements which mislead the public about the review's findings have been made in press releases and briefings by the British Dental Association, the British Medical Association, the National Alliance for Equity in Dental Health, the British Fluoridation Society and others abroad. I should like to correct some of these errors.

1 Whilst there is evidence that water fluoridation is effective at reducing caries, the quality of the studies was generally moderate and the size of the estimated benefit, only of the order of 15%, is far from "massive".

2 The review found water fluoridation to be significantly associated with high levels of dental fluorosis which was not characterised as "just a cosmetic issue".

3 The review did not show water fluoridation to be safe. The quality of the research was too poor to establish with confidence whether or not there are potentially important adverse effects in addition to the high levels of fluorosis. The report recommended that more research was needed.

4 There was little evidence to show that water fluoridation has reduced social inequalities in dental health.

5 The review could come to no conclusion as to the cost-effectiveness of water fluoridation or whether there are different effects between natural or artificial fluoridation.

6 Probably because of the rigour with which this review was conducted, these findings are more cautious and less conclusive than in most previous reviews.

7 The review team was surprised that in spite of the large number of studies carried out over several decades there is a dearth of reliable evidence with which to inform policy. Until high quality studies are undertaken providing more definite evidence, there will continue to be legitimate scientific controversy over the likely effects and costs of water fluoridation.

(Signed) T.A. Sheldon,

Professor Trevor Sheldon, BSc, MSc, DSc, FMedSci.