

Legislative Testimony
HB 5243 An Act Concerning The Use Of Mercury In Dentistry
March 7, 2012
Jeffrey Rosow DMD

Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee,

I'm Dr. Jeff Rosow the Dental Director at Connecticut Valley Hospital (CVH)- a state hospital serving psychiatric and substance abuse clients in Middletown. Although I need to be clear that I'm not here representing DMHAS or the viewpoints or perspectives of the Department, I have been working as a full time dentist at CVH for the last 31yrs, and am presently the only dentist employed by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. I've also been involved in the CT Mission of Mercy since it began. I am here to express my concerns regarding HB #5243 proposing to ban the use of amalgam fillings by Connecticut dentists, since it would have a negative effect on the care of my patients, along with other special needs patients.

Amalgam as a dental material is by far the most suitable and durable substance discovered so far for the various challenges encountered in treating a special needs population such as the individuals I treat daily at CVH. It is quickly and easily placed, technique forgiving, and although not ideal can be placed in an environment where bleeding and moisture are difficult to control. It is much less expensive than the other alternatives and has withstood the test of time far longer than the tooth colored materials we are using today, which have inherent properties making them an extremely poor choice in some of the conditions that we're faced with in challenging patient populations. Some of the challenges with using alternative materials are:

1. They must be placed in ideal moisture free environments which many times are impossible to achieve on the individuals I serve.
2. They take much longer to place since they need to be placed in small increments at a time and hardened with a special light for 40 seconds for each increment. Many of my patients find it difficult to sit for long periods of time in the chair, and when performing these procedures on patients in the operating room under general anesthesia, it subjects them to being under general anesthesia for a much longer period of time
3. They are much more expensive – which adds significantly to the cost of treatment which in these times of economic crisis would create even greater roadblocks to accessing care.
4. Some of them are more susceptible to recurrent tooth decay than amalgam which has bacteriostatic properties.
5. Amalgam has been used successfully for over 100yrs. The tooth-colored materials are being developed and modified daily trying to overcome the limitations of their predecessors.
6. They are weaker than amalgam

Some of the arguments for banning amalgam have been related to both health and environmental issues due to the mercury content. Organizations such as the National Institute of Health, the US Public Health Service, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Alzheimer's Association, and World Health Organization, not to mention other US government led panels for the last fifty years, have all weighed in that amalgam poses no hazards to health. It is a safe and effective filling material. Although I'll leave presenting the actual research to others who are more academically oriented my answer to these concerns is:

1. Since amalgam is a combination of metals, it has entirely different properties than mercury itself. As for the environment, waste amalgam is not a significant source of mercury pollution. According to the EPA, less than 1 percent of the total amount of mercury released to the environment from human activity comes from dentistry. In Connecticut we're required to capture and recycle amalgam waste.
2. As mentioned previously, there have been a lot of credible studies on amalgam and based on scientific findings and clinical data, the U.S. food and Drug administration decided in 2009 that the exposure to mercury vapor from dental amalgam doesn't put individuals age six and older at risk for mercury-associated adverse health effects. It was concluded that no properly designed, scientific study demonstrated that dental amalgam causes any long-term health effects or disease.

Having practiced at CVH successfully for 31 years, I feel I have both the didactic and clinical experience to know the materials that would serve my patients best in a cost effective way. Although I do use the other filling materials mentioned above where they're warranted, I find that based on my experience and observing both where they succeed and fail, I'm starting to become more dependent on amalgam since in many cases these fillings have held up where others have failed. Also in this age of cost savings and efficiency amalgam is far less expensive and time consuming than the other materials. By not allowing those of us who practice on a special needs population to use it is depriving our patients of optimal dental care at an increased cost of time and money in providing it.

I urge you to oppose HB 5243. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have now or you should feel free to contact me at your convenience and I would be happy to talk with you then.

Respectfully Submitted,

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