

The Tooth Decay in Hawai'i's Children

Growing up in my mother's dentist office, I remember many children coming in with gold and silver teeth. Half of my elementary friends had gold or silver teeth as well. Why is this an issue? 72.7 percent of six to eight year olds in Hawai'i have had one or more cavities. Cavities or dental caries are caused by bacteria in your mouth, which could spread to other places in the body. This has the potential of threatening lives. In Hawai'i, tooth decay among children is 100 percent higher than children on the mainland United States. Tooth decay does cause pain and infection. What do we do about this? How does this relate to Clarence T.C. Ching? What happens if we don't do anything? We need to fix this for the better of the entire community.

Fifty years from now, if nothing is done, Hawai'i could be the leading state in the nation for childhood tooth decay. Dental health is just as important as taking care of the rest of the body, but many people do not recognize this. Only 18.54 percent of six year old children in Hawai'i have cavity free permanent teeth. In fifty years, the rate could decline and more children in Hawai'i will have some sort of oral disease. More children will miss days of school due to intolerable pain. Strains of new oral diseases could possibly happen. Oral diseases could possibly evolve. If left untreated, disease can lead to malnourishment, bacterial infections, emergency surgery, and on rare occasions, death.

Why does this problem exist? This problem exists due to the lack of education. Dental health is the most prevalent unmet health need of children in the United States. Income does factor into this problem as children below the poverty line suffer twice as much tooth decay as children who can afford dental care. For children below the poverty line, their disease is more

likely to be untreated. It is estimated that twenty seven percent of children in America go without dental care each year.

My solution to the high dental carie rate in Hawai'i is to fluoridate our community water supply and to educate the general public about dental health. It is actually a cost effective choice to fluoridate the community's water supply. In most cities, for every dollar spent for water fluoridation, it saves \$38 in dental treatment costs yearly. If the water supply does get fluoridated, it would be available to everyone, regardless of age or income. This solution is mostly targeted to the community, so adults with tooth decay would also have access to this type of water.

Education about this problem is crucial. How can we treat people if they don't know about it? For example, the government should spend money on public service announcements, for example, common core curriculum has its own public service announcements. The government should also have an education program like DARE that brings awareness to dental hygiene. Infection in an upper back tooth can spread to the sinus behind the eye, which can enter the brain. In 2007, a twelve year old boy in Maryland had died after bacteria from an abscessed tooth traveled to his brain. He had two brain operations which had totaled to almost \$250,000. A simple \$80 tooth extraction could have saved his life. In 2011, a Cincinnati man died from an untreated tooth infection. He could not afford the extraction of the infected tooth. He had received prescriptions for antibiotics and pain medications, but he could not afford both. He decided to take the pain medication. The infection had spread and his brain swelled. He had died a few days later. People need to know that untreated cavities have the potential of being deadly.

If we act now, the number of children with such dental caries can decline. More children will have healthy teeth. If educated now, more children could practice healthier dental hygiene and hopefully pass those practices on to their children. More parents would meet the dental needs of their children.

The theme of my entry is to do this for the betterment of my community. Clarence T.C. Ching's vision was to help his community succeed. He put so much work into the communities we have today. Without him, we would not have communities like Salt Lake. What would be of our community if our citizens aren't healthy? The solution I am proposing is best for everyone. Clarence T.C. Ching did what he thought what was best for all people.

With the dental health of children being overlooked now, I do hope there is a change in the future. The problem is urgent and should not be ignored. What would be the health of children in the future if dental hygiene is ignored? Would my grandchildren have decaying teeth, causing them intolerable pain? Will their friends also have the same problem? I do not know. What I do know is that we can change the future if we do something about this now. I think what's best for our community is to educate the public and to fluoridate our water supply. Clarence T.C. Ching would have probably thought of a solution to better his community.