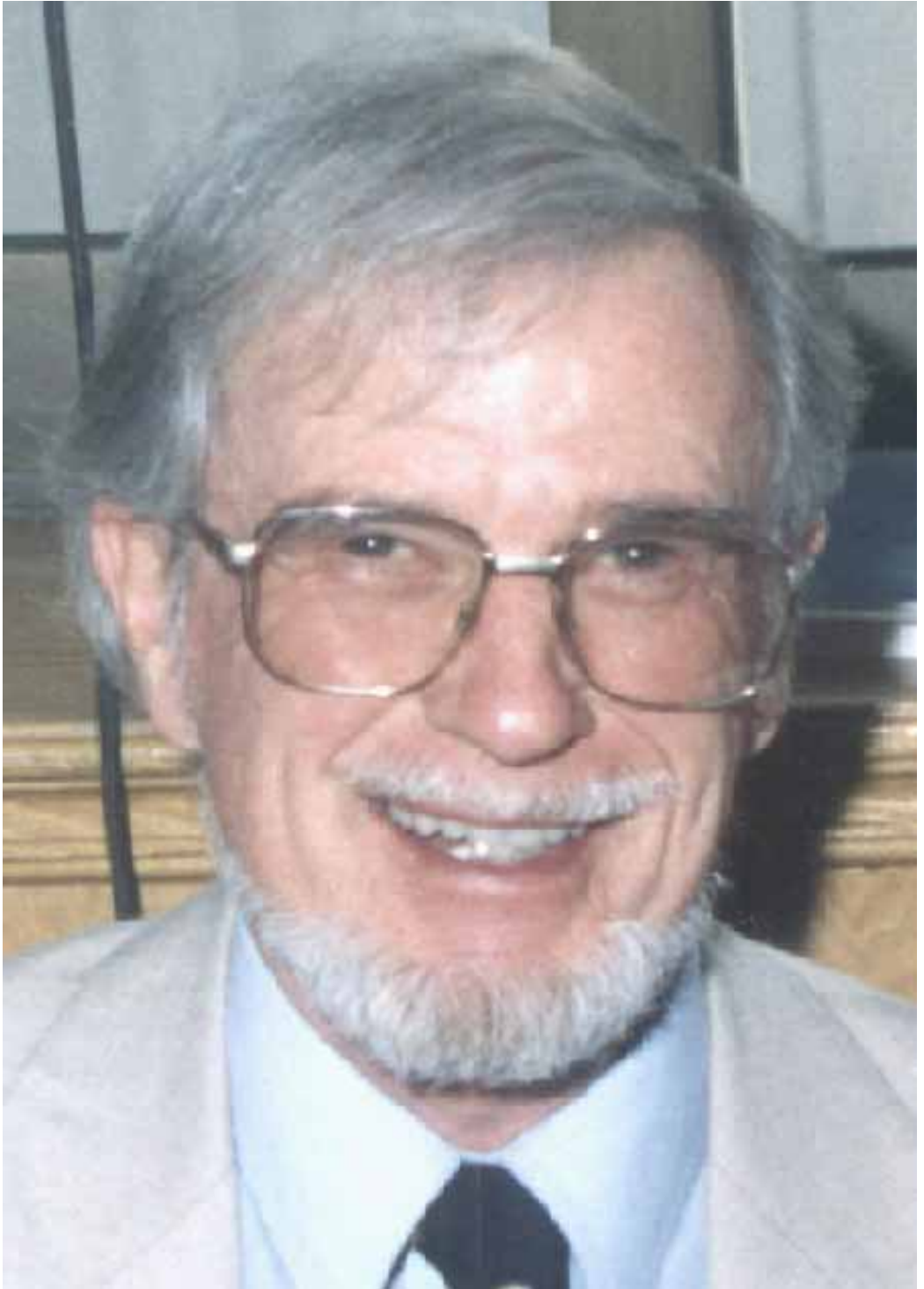


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John Alexander Colquhoun, B.D.S., Ph.D.
4 January 1924 – 23 March 1999
Editor of *Fluoride* 1991-1998

IN MEMORIAM

To all who knew him, Dr John Colquhoun, our late Editor, was an extraordinary individual. Although small in stature, he walked tall. Energetic, yet modest and unselfish in service to others, he was also exceptionally gifted intellectually and outstanding in personal achievement. His dental patients, colleagues, staff personnel, and other associates all had the highest regard for him and the quality of his work and deeply appreciated his uncompromising commitment to their best interests.

While holding elective offices and professional appointments, his unflinching performance in them invariably earned him the enduring gratitude and admiration of all who served with or under him. In 1991, he generously agreed to take on the demanding but unsalaried work of editing and publishing *Fluoride* while also becoming Treasurer of the ISFR. In the years that followed the Journal rapidly increased in size and quality as he expanded its scope and coverage.

Through his research and extensive critical reading, he sometimes found himself at odds with widely held views. Thus, in the early 1980s, when his own careful investigations and critical examination of available data indicated that water fluoridation in New Zealand was showing essentially no dental benefit but was clearly causing harm, he did not hesitate to oppose official policy even though it cost him his prestigious position as Auckland's Principal Dental Officer.

After Dr Colquhoun's premature death earlier this year, there was an outpouring of praise and tributes from his friends and others who only had professional contacts with him. From these heartfelt testimonials published in this issue, readers will readily understand why he was held in such high esteem and why his loss has created a void that will never be filled.

Albert W. Burgstahler

TRIBUTE TO JOHN COLQUHOUN

John Alexander Colquhoun, Bachelor of Dental Surgery (Otago), Diploma in Education (Sydney), Master of Philosophy (First Class), PhD (Auckland) died peacefully at his home in Auckland, New Zealand on March 23 1999.

The members of the International Society for Fluoride Research are deeply saddened by his passing. Although he was aged 75 years, his death feels untimely. He remained intellectually vigorous until almost the last moment.

Following John's retirement in 1984, at the age of 60 years, as Principal Dental Officer in the Department of Health in Auckland, he embarked on research and was awarded in 1987 a Doctorate in Philosophy by the University of Auckland. In 1991, at age 67, he commenced service as the Treasurer for the International Society for Fluoride Research and as Editor for *Fluoride*, the quarterly journal of the Society. The journal flourished under the eight years of his editorship, and he handed over the reins as Managing Editor less than one month from when he departed from us. Taking on these tasks was a major commitment for John and his wife Joy, but with typical courage and disregard for personal costs, he undertook the unpaid task so that a format allowing free intellectual debate on issues related to fluoride could be preserved. He feared that a level intellectual playing field might be lost if control of the journal went to others who might have more financial resources but less willingness to allow both sides of the various issues be expressed. He saw himself continuing "the battle with Titans" commenced by the Journal founder, the late George L Waldbott, who wrote *A Struggle with Titans*.¹

John was courageous in speaking out for what he saw to be true. He was not afraid to change his mind. While serving as a Glen Eden (Auckland) Borough Councillor between

1955 and 1958, he persuaded the Mayor and the majority of his fellow councillors to agree to fluoridation of the water supply. With subsequent regret, he poured scorn on another Council member, a lay person who had heard and accepted the case against fluoridation. A few years later, as the city's Principal Dental Officer, he published a paper reporting how children's tooth decay had declined in the city following fluoridation of its water with the greatest benefit appearing in the low-income areas. The decline was attributed to fluoride. He was so articulate and successful in his support of water fluoridation that his public service superiors in Wellington asked him to make fluoridation the subject of a world study tour in 1980, after which he became the Department of Health expert on fluoridation. For a short time, he then led a campaign to promote fluoridation in those parts of New Zealand which had resisted having fluoride put into their drinking water. However, further information from New Zealand and overseas indicated that tooth decay was declining just as much in the nonfluoridated areas as in the fluoridated ones.

The doubts these incongruous reports gave rise to were settled with reassurances from fluoridationists around the world and he was duly appointed chairman of a national "Fluoridation Promotion Committee." His instructions were to inform the public, and his fellow professionals, that water fluoridation resulted in better teeth for children, when compared with places with no fluoridation.

Before complying, however, he looked at the statistics from Auckland and found that fewer fillings were required in children attending dental clinics in the nonfluoridated part of Auckland than in the fluoridated areas. Similar results were found in other parts of New Zealand, the United States of America, Australia, Britain, Canada, Sri Lanka, Greece, Malta, Spain, Hungary and India. John did not carry out his instructions to tell people that teeth were better in the fluoridated areas. Instead, he studied in detail the studies that appeared to show benefit. He found flaws in the "Hastings Fluoridation Experiment," an early fluoridation study carried out in New Zealand. After obtaining official papers under the Freedom of Information Act, he found that, in effect, the trial had been "rigged" with the school dentists in the area of the experiment being instructed to change their method of diagnosing tooth decay so that they recorded much less decay after fluoridation.

Voicing the view that fluoridation was harmful rather than beneficial was not popular and attracted criticism. John's clarity of vision, however, meant that such criticisms were like water off a duck's back, and he was unrelenting in his efforts to tell people the truth about fluoridation, both within New Zealand and internationally. His submissions, in 1997, to the Lord Mayor's Task force on Fluoridation in Brisbane, Australia were influential in the community representatives coming down clearly against the fluoridation of Brisbane's water.

John's contribution to the International Society of Fluoride Research were recognized by the Society with a formal presentation to him of a plaque recording his meritorious service at the 22nd Conference of the Society, in Bellingham, Washington, USA in August 1998.

Many other things could be noted about John. His community service included holding office with the Kelston High Schools' Board of Governors, the Auckland Workers' Educational Association, the New Zealand Foundation for Peace Studies, the New Zealand Association for Community Education, the University of Auckland Committee for Continuing Education, the New Zealand Workers' Educational Association and the Auckland Workers' Educational Association. Other professional appointments included Dental Officer of the Hokianga Mobile School Dental Clinic, which allowed proximity to his future wife, Joy Child; Supervisor of the Clinical Course, School for Dental Nurses, Wellington; Supervisor of Basic (Human Biology) Course, School for Dental Nurses, Auckland; President of the New Zealand Society of Dentistry for Children, Tutor in History

of Education, University of Auckland; and, at the time of his death, Honorary Research Fellow, University of Auckland.

In an appreciation written at the time of his retirement as Principal Dental Officer in 1984, it was noted that John was a soft-spoken man of deep sincerity and dedication with a sensitive awareness to the needs and wants of others, especially the underprivileged. After retirement he devoted two days a week to improving the educational standards of those most in need which included many Polynesians. He persisted with a cause which he believed to be right and just, even to his own detriment. He fulfilled the adage that “People only throw stones at trees with fruit on them.” An example of his persistence was borrowing a set of scalers to take to the annual meetings of the Principal Dental Officers in Wellington year after year in an effort to influence a decision to have more efficient scalers supplied to School Dental Nurses. His conviction that fluoridation should be reassessed was also noted in 1984. He was politically adept, able to focus on the subject under discussion, and had the abilities to remain calm and summarise honestly and fairly. He listened sympathetically to the opinions of others and was open to reason and change. He believed it was “better to be right than consistent.” He was held in very high regard by his staff. During his farewell function many nurses spoke sincerely and enthusiastically about his caring attitude towards them and their patients. He had a very high standard in his clinical judgement and technical treatment. While his retirement was regretted, in view of the knowledge and skill that he possessed, it was easier to accept as he intended to redirect his talents to serve others, especially those most in need of his help.

How much he gave was deeply appreciated by the members of the International Society for Fluoride Research.

John was predeceased by Joy’s death on September 27, 1997. Our heart-felt condolences go to his surviving family, his brother Neil, son David, daughters Sara and Rachel and son-in-law Gerard.

We might do worse than to ponder on the words from a poem *Wanderer’s Night Song*, by the German poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and set to music by Franz Schubert, with which Waldbott concludes his book:¹

Above all summits there is peace,
Above all tree tops one
Senses scarcely a breath.
The birds are silent in the woods;
Wait, oh wait – you, too, will soon be at rest.

Bruce Spittle
Managing Editor, *Fluoride*.

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AN INSPIRING LEGACY

As the spokesperson on water fluoridation for the Australian College of Nutritional and Environmental Medicine on the Lord Mayor of Brisbane’s Task Force on Fluoridation, I wish to pay personal, collective and profound homage to the memory of Dr John Colquhoun.

Without John’s dedication, integrity, and self-sacrificing help, Brisbane would not have been able to retain its democratic right of “Freedom of Choice.” At the time when fluoridation was proposed by a mayoral candidate, the plan was that compulsory

fluoridation should be imposed upon every citizen, without their consent or even reference to the will of the people through a referendum. John's vibrant lecture to the members of the Taskforce, together with his stoical, forthright contribution at the public debate at the City Hall resulted in an overwhelming victory for democracy.

Not many of us on Planet Earth can be assured of leaving a perpetual legacy such as John Colquhoun has bequeathed to us. By his pursuit of honesty in scientific reporting, John's footprints in the sands of time have paved the way for campaigners to build an edifice to truth which will be a far greater monument to him than any headstone which might grace his final resting place.

The Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Jim Soorley, joins with me in the search for those elusive words which would do justice to his memory. *Vale, John.* Your inspiration adds a special dimension to the efforts of those who pledge to build on the ethical tenets which you have espoused and for which you sacrificed your health.

The Sword of Truth will not sleep in our hands, nor shall we rest until the evil of compulsory fluoridation has been vanquished.

Fred Clutterbuck,
Wynnum, Queensland, Australia.

A MENTOR, FRIEND AND FELLOW WARRIOR

During World War II, I, like many Canadian servicemen, spent a brief leave in Scotland. This included a visit to a quiet village at the foot of the highlands that proudly announced on an archway over the road, "The home of the Colquhoun." It was not until 1992, in Kyoto, that I was privileged to meet a descendant of this proud clan, John Colquhoun, then Editor of *Fluoride*. Subsequently, via telephone, facsimile and the post, John became a mentor and an acquaintance whom my wife, Anne and I were to meet again in Beijing (1994), Budapest (1996) and Bellingham (1998).

John was a man of integrity, devoted to social justice who fiercely took action against the scientific fraud behind fluoridation. In this battle, John suffered defeats and personal tragedy. But, he returned to fight again. It is not difficult for me to imagine him on these occasions quoting John Dryden's Johnnie Armstrong:

Fight on, my merry men all,
I'm a little wounded, but I am not slain;
I will lay me down for to bleed a while,
Then I'll rise and fight with you again.

John has now left the field. But, his shadow remains long, disproportionate to his physical stature. He in his writings in *Fluoride* and other journals, especially his autobiographical "Why I Changed My Mind About Water Fluoridation"¹ will continue to fight with us even though the author has returned home.

Richard G. Foulkes,
Abbotsford, British Columbia,
Canada

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A SUPPORTER OF RESEARCH

I had the good fortune of knowing Dr John Colquhoun for several years through the

correspondence that our group of authors had with him in his position as Editor of *Fluoride*. Our telephone conversations were always a pleasure. He was most encouraging to us in our work.

I remember one such incident very vividly. Our group had contributed a paper on a study, "Sister chromatid exchanges in fluorotic individuals of North Gujarat," for publication in *Fluoride*. It was sent for review to referees who had returned their comments. Meanwhile, the paper was shown to Dr George Stookey at the 1994 ISFR conference in Beijing for his comments. He immediately recommended its publication on a priority basis as it was the first paper of its kind dealing with studies on fluorotic individuals. On his return to New Zealand, Dr John Colquhoun promptly sent us a fax informing us of these developments, and the paper was published in *Fluoride* 1994;27:215-9. I will always be grateful to Dr Colquhoun for this kind gesture.

It was indeed a pleasure to meet Dr Colquhoun at the XXIIInd Conference of the International Society for Fluoride Research at Bellingham, Washington in August 1998.

May his good soul rest in eternal peace.

N.J. Chinoy,
Gujarat University,
Ahmedabad, India

A MOST FAITHFUL FRIEND

Dr John Colquhoun was an exemplary teacher, investigator, and, yes, a true philosopher – a man who faithfully sought after truth. He was a person we all admired greatly.

I first met Dr Colquhoun in 1994 at the 20th Conference of the International Society for Fluoride Research in Beijing, China. I immediately saw that he was a very benign, gentle, keen-minded individual who had just turned 70.

Earlier I had been in contact with Dr Colquhoun and was deeply impressed and greatly encouraged by the fact that, even while still a dental public health officer charged with promoting water fluoridation, he had made an independent investigation of the available evidence and openly concluded that he could no longer support or advocate the procedure.

After the Beijing conference, our Japanese Society for Fluoride Research (JSFR) arranged for Dr Colquhoun to give a much-appreciated seminar on his research concerning fluoride. At that time, he also brought an anti-nuclear weapons message from citizens of New Zealand to residents of Hiroshima for which they were most grateful.

After attending his last ISFR conference in 1998 in Bellingham, Washington, despite growing illness, Dr Colquhoun went to the trouble of sending me some back issues of *Fluoride* that we have been able to place in university libraries in Tokyo to help complete their sets of this valuable journal.

We owe a deep debt of gratitude to Dr John Colquhoun – a most faithful friend to us all.

Kenji Akiniwa, Editor
Fluoride Research, J of the JSFR,
Tokyo, Japan

A TRUE SCIENTIST

After the 19th conference of the ISFR held in Kyoto, Japan in 1992, in response to an invitation from the Japanese Society for Fluoride Research, Dr Colquhoun gave two lectures which made a deep impression on the audiences. I had the honour of working closely with him at this time, and a friendship began that continued until his death.