

Archives

Steven P. Geiermann, DDS

Obituaries

David B. Ast, DDS, MPH, a pioneer in the efforts to fluoridate water, died on February 3, 2007 at the age of 104. Dr. Ast spearheaded the fight to fluoride water in New York State in the 1940s and helped prove its safety and effectiveness in the prevention of tooth decay. He was born in New York City and practiced dentistry before joining New York State's Bureau of Dental Health in 1938. He served as the bureau's director before becoming an assistant commissioner of the State Department of Health. Dr. Ast received his dental degree from New York University and a master's degree in public health from the University of Michigan.

In 1944, Ast began a 10-year study of fluoridation that provided strong evidence of the benefits of treating public water. For the study, he selected two towns of comparable size along the Hudson River, Newburgh and Kingston, and compared the health and dental records of their residents. While Newburgh's water was treated with fluoride, Kingston's water was not. At that time, there

was vociferous opposition to fluoridation throughout the country, with many arguing that fluoride compounds could pose unknown health risks. Some argued that adding fluoride to public water "could even be unconstitutional."

He and colleagues at the Bureau of Dental Health reported significant results showing that children 6 to 9 years old in Newburgh had a 60 percent reduction in numbers of cavities, a reduction that approached 70 percent by the time they reached the 12- to 14-year-old bracket. As important, comparisons of cases of cancers, birth defects, and heart and kidney disease showed no significant differences between the two towns. Although many other communities across the United States had already begun to fluoridate their water, these findings were used as a landmark case study for other municipalities in New York State. Dr. Ast became a prominent advocate for fluoridating New York City's water supply, which did not start until 1965. In the 1950s, Dr. Ast and others repeated the experiment in Minneola, on Long Island, with similar positive results.

Umo Isong, BDS, MPH, PhD, a faculty member in the UCSF School of Dentistry's Department of Preventive and Restorative Dentistry and the Division of Dental Public Health/Oral Epidemiology, died on February 26, 2007. Dr. Isong received her DDS degree from the University of Lagos, Nigeria; her MPH degree from the University of Alabama at Birmingham; and a PhD from the University of North Carolina. In 2003, she became board-certified in dental public health. Her research focused on oral health disparities, especially in children with special health care needs. As Ruth Nowjack-Raymer attests, Dr. Isong was one of the few researchers in the world directing her



energy to improving our understanding of the oral health needs of this underserved group.

Jack D. Robertson, DDS, a resident of Baton Rouge and formerly of Arlington, VA, died on March 2, 2007. Dr. Robertson was born in 1924 in Logan, WV. He entered the US Army following his graduation as valedictorian of Logan High School, served for 3 years during World War II in the 104th Infantry Division, and received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart Medal. He attended The Citadel and the University of Maryland and received his dental degree from the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery. He was commissioned in the US Public Health Service where he earned the rank of dental director and had a distinguished 31-year



career, during which he received the Meritorious Service Medal. At his retirement, the Jack D. Robertson Dental Award was established, which is given annually in his honor to recognize the achievement of the USPHS dental officers.

Retirements

Alice M. Horowitz, PhD, a health education specialist who joined the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR) in 1976, retired in February 2007, ending a career of 31 years at the institute. Her research contributed extensively to the knowledge base of key dental diseases and oral conditions, with a focus on health promotion, health education, disease prevention, and early diagnosis. She was instrumental in managing a number of consensus development conferences, the most recent being the management and diagnosis of dental caries across the life span. Her work in early diagnosis and prevention of oral cancer created new survey instruments and educational materials and was the impetus for statewide models for oral cancer

prevention. Dr. Horowitz served as the NIDCR lead for the Healthy People 2010 national objectives, and through collaborative work with the DHHS Office of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, she played a major role in drafting the progress review reports for the Surgeon General and Assistant Secretary for Health. Most recently, she took the lead in developing a research agenda for oral health literacy and founded the NIH Interest Group on Health Literacy. Dr. Horowitz served as NIDCR's liaison to numerous organizations and routinely mentored dental public health residents and visiting scientists from all over the world. Her contributions have been recognized by federal, professional, and voluntary organizations domestically and internationally. These include, among others, the NIH Director's award, the Surgeon General's exemplary medal, the American Association of Public Health Dentistry's President's award, and Honorary Diplomate status of the American Board of Dental Public Health.

Patricia Bryant, PhD, program director of the Basic and Applied Behavioral/Social Science Research Program and a psychologist at the Center for Clinical Research, retired in March 2007, ending a 30-year career as a health scientist administrator with the NIDCR. She joined the institute as behavioral and social sciences were emerging into the then "NIDR" research portfolio. She was a driving force within the extramural research program area by nurturing and managing grant applications and awards in this field. Together with Lois Cohen and others, Dr. Bryant coauthored many sentinel books on incorporating a multidisciplinary social and behavioral scientific approach into dentistry. Her most recent efforts focused on integrating the behavioral sciences into basic biomedical research, with a focus on assessing the effects of stress on oral and craniofacial diseases and conditions. Dr. Bryant served as the NIDCR liaison to many NIH and PHS committees and was a major contributor to the overall scientific agenda of the NIDCR throughout her career.

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