



We kneaded mercury with our bare hands

The Norwegian online newspaper VG Nett has published a long article with the above photo and title, which may be read in Norwegian at www.vg.no/helse/artikkel.php?artid=510816. The article was written by Francis Lundh.

The text under the above photo reads: *Tordis Stigen Klausen has won the Zola-prize for her untiring battle for work-related disability compensation. She is now looked upon as a pioneer among several hundred who will be applying for similar compensation. This photo of Klausen was taken before a court trial in 1998. Foto: Roger Neuman/VG/Scanpix.*

Parts of this article are translated here.

After 14 years, the battle that Tordis Stigen Klausen (65) has been fighting for workman's compensation is beginning to produce results. As a former dental assistant, Klausen has fought for workman's compensation from the government for what she considers to be mercury poisoning caused by amalgam dental fillings. In 1998 she lost her lawsuit against the government.

Now, 14 years after she first started her efforts in 1994, many others are joining in: Tannhelsesekretærenes Forbund (ThsF), a labor union for dental assistants, has announced that hundreds of claims for compensation will be filed; amalgam fillings have been banned in Norway as of January 1 2008; and the government has now granted funds for research.

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Guidelines for handling amalgam were in years previous to the January 1 ban, quite different than when Klausen worked as a dental assistant in the 1970s. “There were a lot of spills. We warmed up copper amalgam in a steel spoon over an open flame, and then put it in our hands and kneaded it. We didn’t use gloves until 1986” Klausen said to VG Nett.

Had abnormal bleeding

She had then been working for a long time with this material that contains quite a lot of mercury – without any form of protective equipment. She says that her first hospitalization was in the 1980s, but by then she had already been suffering with serious symptoms for several years.

“I started experiencing mucus and vomiting very early. I had acute asthma bronchitis many times beginning in 1978. Then I experienced acute liver symptoms and kidney failure. In 1984 I had abnormal bleeding and a spontaneous abortion and was hospitalized and sent to the neurological department. The doctor there advised me to contact the dental college”, she said.

Klausen says that she did not understand what the neurologist meant when he advised her to contact the dental college, so she did not do that. It was first 10 years later, in 1994, that she began to suspect a connection between mercury in the amalgam fillings she had handled in the dental clinic, and all of the symptoms she had.

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Tordis Klausen has, after losing in court in 1998, found several similar cases internationally, and contributes information to the website MercuryMadness (www.mercurymadness.org), where a number of reports are posted that show that they have been injured by mercury, according to Klausen and others.

Klausen is a pioneer

She is now considered a pioneer, and received the Zola-prize in 2006, awarded annually in Norway by “Foreningen til fremme av sivilt mot” (an organization that commends civilian courage).

“She has been a pioneer for this work, and she has lifted this issue up into the light. Very many have been told that their symptoms are just psychological, and they have been offered medication for psychiatric disturbances. This has been a terrible disappointment for many who are so sick that they can no longer work. When they now receive recognition that this is not something they themselves were responsible for, that it is a work-related injury, then this is very important for their quality of life”, said Gerd Bang-Johansen, the leader of an organization for dental assistants, ThsF.

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