

Case History of Karen Palmer – American Dental Assistant

My name is Karen Palmer and I was a dental assistant for many years until I was diagnosed with heavy metal toxicity from mercury and lead in May 2004. I experienced a very sudden onset of a combination of stroke and heart attack symptoms, including full body tremors in September 1998 that I now know to be caused from chronic mercury vapour exposure.

After a 5-day hospital stay and numerous tests by several specialists, I was given a prescription for the dizziness and released. The explanation I was given for my episode was....."we see this sometimes, we really don't know why", and suggested I get a stress test. I slowly began to feel less dizzy, but never really regained the same level of energy I normally possessed and the numbness in my arms still persisted.

Then in May 2003, I was struck with pain, numbness, tingling and burning in my lower left jaw, face, mouth and tongue which eventually spread down the entire left side of my body. While waiting for an appointment to be seen by a neurologist in July 2003, I experienced another sudden onset of symptoms very similar to that in September 1998, except this time the pain in my lower left jaw had radiated to the lower right jaw, face and body. I was seen at another hospital and they also could not offer any explanation for what I was experiencing, and suggested I keep my upcoming appointment with the neurologist.

I finally saw the neurologist and he believed I had MS due to the "sensory disturbances" that were apparent during my exam. But, after all the negative test findings, he referred me to a MS specialist who concluded that I did not have MS.....but that my brain was just "misfiring" and more active on the left side. He suggested I should "forget about all I was feeling and get on with my life."

That was January 2004.

Three months later, at a visit with my chiropractor, she discovered a loss of tendon reflex below my left knee and was also concerned with my B-12 levels because they were 3x that of a normal level. She strongly encouraged me to make an appointment with a doctor specializing in Environmental Medicine. I did act upon her recommendation and after a very comprehensive health history evaluation and testing, and an entire year later, I finally had a definitive diagnosis. I was 1275% toxic from total body mercury burden. Chelation Therapy, thankfully, has lowered my toxic levels, but the overall damage from being toxic remains.

Many dentists are in denial and lack sufficient knowledge and understanding about the dangers of the mercury they are handling daily, but they are also not medical physicians. One would have great cause to wonder and worry about the safety of all the dental school students working with "silver" mercury amalgam filling material.

All dental hygienists release vapour from fillings when they scale and scrape teeth with hand or electronic instruments and when they polish with a rubber cup or bristle brush. As dentists "drill", even more significant levels of vapour pour off of the fillings. The dust and particles created from the drilling process contaminate the patients, doctor, staff and surrounding countertops, wall and floors.

Much to my discredit, I now know more about mercury toxicity than in all the years I handled it. I knew that the "silver" amalgam fillings had mercury in it, hence the M.S.D.S. enclosed and the hazardous shipping label. I thought I was protected from any harm to me because I wore a mask and gloves as per ADA and OSHA stated guidelines. But, I was wrong. Mercury vapour goes right through the mask and gloves!

Needless to say, I am outraged to learn this AND that there is NO "safe" form or "amount" of mercury that belongs in the human body. As a cumulative neurotoxin, all are affected negatively, sadly, in some way. Pregnant women, their foetus and children are especially at risk. Now all the miscarriages in the dental staff are better understood. So much of the other medical symptoms and conditions witnessed also makes better sense.

Current regulations are not always followed or enforced for maximum protection. There is a tremendous need for regular and mandatory testing for chronic mercury toxicity exposure. Now I know and realize I was slowly poisoned over time from a profession that I gave the best years of my life.

Anyone who has ever filled their car with gasoline has "smelled" and "seen" the vapour rising from the pump handle and the posted warnings to avoid inhaling the fumes - unlike mercury vapour, which is odourless, colourless, tasteless and vaporizes at room temperature. How I wish I could have known how damaging this vapour is, but the emphasis and main concern was always on infectious diseases, disinfection control measures and sterilization methods. Optimal evacuation and ventilation devices and equipment are so key for everyone who enters into a dental office.

Patients must be told when they are given a choice of filling material options that each "silver" amalgam being placed just inches from their brain contains 50% mercury and that mercury vapour is released when they chew, brush, or grind their teeth and also when they eat hot or cold drinks or food. Mandatory Informed Patient Consent is so crucial because significant levels of mercury vapour can cause permanent damage to the brain and kidneys. I am living proof of that fact. All the parasthesia, toxic neuropathy and chronic fatigue still plague me today. It never occurred to me where all mercury-laden scrap fillings and dental wastewater ended up and the eventual devastation to the environment. All dental offices, clinics and schools must install Amalgam Separators as many states have done across the country from Maine to California.

This council has a very unique opportunity to have an enormous positive impact on the current and future health and well-being of the people and environment of the city of Philadelphia.

There are approximately 266,000 dental assistants practicing nationwide, nearly 3,000 of them in the Philadelphia area. I hope and pray they know more about Neuro-toxicity from mercury vapour than I did because I can't even begin to express in words how sorry I am to all the trusting patients. We are all, "First, to do no harm." Now I can't help but feel to be carrying a huge burden of knowledge, much too late in coming the guilt, for having directly assisted in the placement and removal of thousands of toxic "silver" mercury fillings. Now all I can and must do is anything and everything to help all affected by mercury as a result of "modern" dentistry, at its best?

Concerning mercury.....it's all bad.....nothing "GOOD" about it! In this world and life, sometimes things have to get worse before they can get better. To say the very least, it is a gross understatement that many people will be shocked to hear and learn all there is to know about "what's in their mouth."

God forgive and help us all.