Elizabeth Anne Fanning, 1918-2007

Elizabeth (Betty) Ann Fanning was born in New Zealand in 1918 and completed her doctoral theses at the University of New Zealand (1960). With a strong interest in tooth development and eruption she was awarded her doctorate in 1960 from the University of New Zealand. Dr Fanning held a number of positions during her career, most notably at the Forsyth Dental Infirmary for Children (currently known as the Forsyth Institute). It was here, through the partnership formed between the Infirmary and Harvard University, that the health benefits of fluoride were discovered. Her collaborative work with Coenraad Moorrees and Ed Hunt, placed Dr Fanning at the forefront of dental research and knowledge.

She moved to Adelaide in 1962 and was a distinguished Reader/Research Associate until 1982. In 1967, Dr Fanning published preliminary results from the first clinical trials of toothpaste containing fluoride in Australia and the impact on the incidence of caries. This year, 2017, marks 50 years since this landmark study was completed. The complete study of approximately 2500 participants from Adelaide, was published in 1968 in the Australian Dental Journal. Over the next 20 years she was a pioneer of researching the relationship between fluoride and dental decay. Dr Fanning was a strong advocate for improving childhood oral health and examined a number of factors including nutrition, toothbrush design and oral hygiene known to influence the health status of the younger generations. She was at the forefront of recommending the fluoridation of Adelaide’s drinking water which occurred in 1953 and all states and territories were on board by 2008.

As a result of her outstanding research in these fields she received the Rotary International Award for Vocational Excellence in 1984. Although water fluoridation continues to be a controversial issue, in the US and Australia, the World Health Organisation classifies it as one of the top 10 Public Health Achievements in American History. What a remarkable contribution Dr Elizabeth Fanning has made to the oral health of all Australians!

Sources:
http://www.eoas.info/archives/BSAR03018.htm
http://www.eoas.info/biogs/P004229b.htm