Tea not necessarily beneficial for teeth

Daniel Zimmermann

BARCELONA, Spain/LEIPZIG, Germany: Britons may need to rethink their national habit of afternoon tea, as new research presented at the IADR meeting in Barcelona in Spain suggests that the world’s most-consumed beverage contains more fluoride than previously thought. According to a study led by Dr Gary Whitford from the Medical College of Georgia, USA, the concentration of fluoride in black tea can be as high as 9 mg/l compared to 1–5 mg/l found in earlier studies. The findings could explain the occurrence of advanced skeletal and dental fluorosis, a health condition that affects the stability of teeth and bones.

Whitford found that tea leaves accumulate not only fluoride, but also large amounts of aluminium. When the leaves are brewed, both substances form insoluble aluminium fluoride, which cannot be detected by common fluoride detection methods. By breaking the aluminium fluoride bond through diffusion, he found that the amount of fluoride in all cases was 1.4 to 3.3 times higher. Dr Whitford said that this additional fluoride does not contribute to fluorosis when consumed moderately but heavy drinkers should be aware of the danger.

Fluorosis affects more than ten million people worldwide. It is found to be most severe in countries like China and India, where more than 60 million people are at risk. Besides the consumption of tea, common causes of excessive intake of fluoride are the inhalation of fluoride fumes in the chemical industries and drinking water.

Europe to improve patient rights

Daniel Zimmermann

LEIPZIG, Germany: The European Union is advancing the rights of medical and dental patients in all its member states. In a new cross-border health-care directive developed by presidency holder Spain and adopted by the ministers of the European Council in June, patients resident in an EU member state will be entitled to reimbursement for medical services obtained in another member state. The draft directive is expected to become legal once the European Commission, Council and Parliament begin negotiations on a final version later this year.

The decision of the Council comes as a surprise, as Spain opposed an earlier draft, fearing that it would have to bear the costs of many Northern Europeans currently living in retirement on Spanish coasts. The new directive, which offers a compromise to an original proposal by the European Commission, shifts the obligation for reimbursement from the country of residence to the country of origin. Radioactive materials or equipment are excluded.

Members of the European Commission, which is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Council, have criticised the directive’s requirement that patients are to seek prior authorisation from health-care authorities if their treatment involves hi-tech equipment or a hospital stay of more than one night. They claim that the Council version of the directive falls short of their original proposal and creates more confusion for patients.

Cross-border health care between members states of the EU already exists, but this is usually regulated by domestic law and transnational agreements. Rulings by the European Court of Justice over the last ten years had established that patients have the right to obtain health care in other EU countries, but the European Commission desired greater legal certainty so that patients did not have to go to court every time they wished to go abroad for an operation or other medical procedure.