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LATEST STUDY BY QUEEN'S MEDICAL CENTRE CALLS FOR DEFINITIVE TRIAL OF WATER SOFTENERS FOR ATOPIC ECZEMA

The results from the study conducted by a team at The Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham into the effect of softened water on childhood eczema have just been analysed and it has been concluded that a larger more in-depth trial should take place. This indicates that there is a belief, already shared by the National Eczema Society, that soft water could help eczema sufferers. Childhood eczema is on the increase in this country, it now affects 15% of schoolchildren and because there is no cure, parents are constantly looking for alternative treatments.

The study was led by Professor Hywel Williams, Professor of Dermato-epidemiology at The Queen's Medical Centre - its aim was to pilot the method and logistics that are essential for setting up a further, larger clinical trial. The trial involved 17 children from the Nottingham area, aged between one and ten years with moderate or severe atopic eczema. The children were divided into two groups, eight had a real water softener in their homes and nine had a placebo water softener.

To help with the trial, Professor Williams and his team turned to Kinetico, the UK's leading water softener manufacturer. Specifically designed for the UK market, the Kinetico non-electrical water softener fits neatly under the kitchen sink and provides constant and consistent soft water to the whole house. Kinetico was happy to help and provided and installed both the real water softeners and the placebos.

The results of this study provide the crucial missing information needed to design a definitive trial into the effect of softened water on childhood eczema.

Some have always thought that water softeners help eczema sufferers - the National Eczema Society cites two reasons. Firstly, water softeners eliminate scummy soap curd and result in a clean lather, which is kind to skin, reducing dryness and itching, and secondly with softened water, the amount of soap used when washing clothes can be greatly reduced. Also pure soap products can be used in preference to detergents.

Professor Williams of the Queens Medical Centre comments, "This has been a really important study, which provides the first step in testing the potential benefits of a non-pharmacological intervention for a very common condition. The pilot study has provided us with crucial information and we will now apply for funding for a definitive study."

Comments Managing Director of Kinetico, Grant Audemard, "We were delighted to be asked to help in this initial trial and the outcome is a great vote of confidence for investigating the effects of softened water on eczema. Funding for a definitive trial will now be sought and it is hoped this will prove the benefits of soft water on eczema and provide sufferers with an easily accessible and natural way to treat their condition."

The next trial is still in the planning stage, but it would involve approximately 300-350 families over a six-month period and could begin in 2004 with the results available in 2005 if appropriate funding can be found.