



Prof Dr Peter Schärer

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Teaching is all about preparing others for the learning they must do for themselves. This unique mission was fulfilled by Peter Schärer at a national and international leadership level in an exemplary fashion. Clear-headed and sharp-tongued scientific information, followed by brilliant, spontaneous, and humorous off-the-cuff speeches, were Peter's trademarks. His seemingly rough professional shell concealed a soft, highly sensitive core, a man of loving paternal generosity who enjoyed the good things in life. For all of us the best thing was getting to know him as a person: He had a heart of gold. He was an outstanding professional, a bon vivant, and a gourmet in the same person. He loved all aspects of beauty in life, and he personified discipline, excellence, passion, humanity, and a profound understanding of man's frailties.

Peter showed a visionary feeling for developments that might achieve clinical relevance, shaping and promoting in particular esthetic restorative dentistry—including biomaterials and especially ceramics—and implant dentistry untiringly and in an exemplary fashion, second to virtually no one else. His philosophy was esthetic dentistry not for its own sake, but as an important prerequisite and tool for a high-quality result for demanding patients and for a lifelong happy restorative dentist. Furthermore, his basic clinical philosophy of holistic restorative treatment of patients, which always took biologic factors into due account, found its expression in numerous lectures, books, and attractive compendia. If the success of a university teacher is measured by how he promotes the careers of young academics, Peter definitely succeeded beyond all expectations. Three of his students hold chairman positions in Switzerland and Germany. We

all benefited very gratefully in one way or the other.

Peter demonstrated gifts, energies, and ambitions beyond what most have to offer, the combination of which can best be summarized as *leadership*. He was an untiring and disciplined doer, a success-oriented clinician, and above all, a strict yet charismatic teacher and discussion partner, promoting creativity and attracting excellent people from outside. He was a stout defender of the merit principle in not only a professional but also a communicative sense. A competent and pragmatic fighter, always firm but fair in his judgment, he loved and craved heated professional debates.

Having studied dentistry at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, Peter Schärer spent the first part of his program with Professor E. Dolder, who also supervised his doctoral thesis in 1960. He attended postgraduate courses in periodontology with Professor H. Zander at the Eastman Dental Center at Rochester, New York. These studies were concluded in 1966, when Peter was awarded the degree of a Master of Science. Meanwhile, in 1964 he received the internationally renowned Orban Balint Prize of the American Academy of Periodontology. Neurophysiology was the second field that fascinated Peter. This is not surprising, as it exemplifies one of his characteristics—a keen, intuitive sense for topics that would become hot in the future. The combination of periodontology and neurophysiology gave rise to the now classic publications he authored together with Stallard and Zander, followed by a research year with Professor Y. Kawamura at Osaka University in Japan. This is where Peter's trailblazing publications on occlusion and bruxism were written.



After his return to Switzerland Peter Schärer first served as associate professor at the Clinic for Crown and Bridge Prosthodontics at the University of Berne, where he attained his *venia legendi*. In 1972 he was appointed full professor of the Department of Fixed Prosthodontics and Dental Materials at the University of Zurich. In nearly 30 years as full professor at the University of Zurich, he kept a high profile as an avid teacher, extraordinary clinician, and innovative research scientist. In addition to his academic and research work, Peter Schärer served his university in numerous administrative capacities.

He was the first dentist at the University of Zurich to be appointed dean of the Medical Faculty in 1985. Several times, and over many years, he was a president of the Professorial College of the Dental School, and from 1994 until the spring of 2002—even past his academic retirement in the fall of 2000—he served as dean of the Center of Dentistry and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery at the University of Zurich. Lasting memorials of this phase are the new and remodeled buildings of the Dental School. Generations of under- and postgraduate students of dentistry, clinicians in private practice, and especially dental technicians participated in his clinic's success. It was his idea of a special partnership with dental technology that Peter fiercely promoted, resulting in the attainment of a level of quality in this field that is internationally renowned and maximally competitive, especially in the Zurich region. He was also the founder of the Academy for Dental and Occlusal Rehabilitation, a global association of cooperating dentists and dental technologists who meet regularly to exchange knowledge and report their experiences. The prominent reputation of

Swiss dental technology in other countries today is something for which we can thank Peter Schärer.

The international acclaim for Schärer's achievements and for his leading role as a promoter of restorative dentistry manifested itself not only in the form of numerous prizes and awards, but also in the many presidencies of renowned academic associations: the European Academy of Gnathology, the American College of Prosthodontists, the International College of Prosthodontists, and especially the European Academy of Esthetic Dentistry, the latter two of which he was a founding member.

Peter's professional way required perseverance and sacrifice not only on his part but also on the part of his wife, Saiko. Along with his many students, colleagues, and friends whom he accompanied during their careers, we thank his family for helping us benefit from Peter Schärer's success. To so many he gave the great gift of knowing the joy of being esthetically and biologically driven restorative dentists, and he helped turn restorative thinking into reality. The personal and professional philosophy of Peter Schärer, his dedication to dentistry, and the many personal memories he brought into our lives will live on within us for a long time to come.

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Peter Schärer was a gifted academic, highly regarded as one of the most influential figures of his time in the dental profession. He was a pioneer in dental education and developed an outstanding teaching institute at the University of Zurich. In turn, this institute has produced many brilliant clinicians and academics.

In 1989, he had to be persuaded to join a formative European Academy of Esthetic Dentistry; however, in time he became one of the strongest advocates of disseminating the principles of high-quality esthetic dentistry throughout Europe. His presidency started in 1995 with the first closed meeting in Interlaken, followed by an opening meeting in 1996 in St Moritz, where skiing was combined with a tremendous meeting.

His considerable academic credibility was a significant boost for the academy in its fledgling state. He had a firm, guiding hand in its development, displaying a fine intellect, single-minded determination, strong leadership, and great energy.

Peter had a clear vision of the future, strongly encouraging clinicians from the far-flung corners of western Europe and championing the role of the dental technician as an integral member of the dental team. He believed that high-quality esthetic dentistry was not the exclusive preserve of an elite few and helped to raise awareness and standards throughout Europe.

Always encouraging new ideas, he was an archetypal lateral thinker and good listener. Ever prepared to provide others an opportunity to develop, he helped to promote those in whom he saw potential.

One of the many outstanding skills that really set him apart was his uncanny ability as a moderator to pick out even the most heavily disguised Achilles heel of any presentation, lighting up an audience with his contributions in the process. This emphasis on discussion, which was engendered at that time, is one of the cornerstones of the academy today.

Peter brought much more than his great presence to the academy; he was followed by a number of his brilliant former students who are now some of the leading international authorities in their respective fields. The academy has been enriched in the process, arguably making it the leading organization of its type in Europe.

Peter traveled to many meetings with his wife Saiko. As a couple they were close but always reached out to others. They were engaging company and hearty companions. His two daughters, Lily and Isabelle, also had good relationships with him, always giving support.

He was very proud of his students, and they in turn admired him greatly. His essential warm-heartedness and wry sense of humor was accompanied by his ability to speak his mind with vigor. He did not excel at everything, however: He struggled with golf, which used to exasperate him. Nevertheless, at his 70th birthday party Peter gathered his friends together in Zurich to play golf and have fun. In his inimitable style he sang with friends—including Sir John McLean—the song “My Way.” Maybe this is part of the legacy that defines this man.

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Brightness and symmetry: The rogue elephants

One such difficult elephant is the current trend toward teeth with unrealistic brightness and perfect bilateral symmetry—what I call the media image. The glamour of cosmetic dentistry as promoted by industry, the media, and self-appointed

gurus often produces a distorted and false appearance that clearly lacks the dynamics of natural beauty in visible teeth. Bleaching, adhesive bonding, and porcelain laminates remove the patients' dread of having their teeth reduced to small "peaks" for crowns. They say, "And while you are at it, Doc, make them whiter and more even!"

But what we get from this endeavor is not an individual artistic creation but a product line for the media image. With very little effort this product makes all patients with smile makeovers look alike. Closure of incisal embrasures for all ages and blockage of gingival embrasures have become routine, unnatural beauty. Individual personality goes out the window. There are numerous sources of this illusion. Bleaching, graphic art, beauty as perfection, and the perception that whiter teeth and bilateral symmetry are younger and sexier all contribute to this deception. The media alter color and form in their images, sending the message that everyone can have this deceptive, cosmetic beauty. Known color dimensions of natural teeth are largely ignored. These include basic principles such as: chroma increases at the gingival level, the central incisors are the brightest maxillary teeth, and the canine is much higher in chroma and lower in value than the incisors.¹

Elephants and Cowboys

I have always identified with elephants and cowboys. They have a special meaning in my life, representing strength and integrity.

Of course, there are good elephants, and there are bad ones. The expression about the "elephant in the room" refers to something or someone who fills the room with an obvious presence. I often think of Peter Schärer as a good elephant in the room of dentistry—a strong, intelligent, and unavoidable force. He was a teacher of remarkable integrity, and you could not ignore what he had to say. By word and action he was always urging us to be better. Like an elephant he left very deep footprints. Peter was also like a real working cowboy. He was tough but fair. He spoke the truth without deception, and his word was his honor. Real cowboys would say he rode tall in the saddle. Through his intensity he instilled ethics that stayed with you even when no one was looking over your shoulder. My friend Peter is, to me, like the finest of elephants and cowboys. But dentistry has other elephants and cowboys to deal with.



Symmetry and art: Connecting good elephants and real cowboys

The cowboy photograph shows a two-dimensional work of art cut out of a steel plate. Several things are immediately comprehended: identification (cowboy), action, and symmetry (human form), even though the left and right sides are not mirror images. In the dentition we have the advantage of three dimensions as well as color to achieve active, natural beauty. The challenge is there for dentists and technicians who claim to be esthetic creators to cultivate the desire in our patients for natural beauty, rather than a copycat product line.

As I follow lectures and publications it is very clear to me that European dentists and laboratory technicians have the talent and skill to command the lead role in creating beautiful teeth. They are far ahead of the media image in America.

I look to the European Academy of Esthetic Dentistry for continued leadership in natural-appearing esthetic dentistry. Its

members and other dentists and technicians who follow their lead are my heroes. Their artistic endeavors leap from the screen and page in a wild stampede and demand, "Follow me!"

Peter Schärer will long be remembered for his awe-inspiring presence in dentistry. Like a real working cowboy, his motto could have been "Take pride in your work."²

How do you want to be remembered?

References

1. Goodkind RJ, Schwabacher WB. Use of a fiber-optic colorimeter for in vivo color measurements of 2830 anterior teeth. *J Prosthet Dent* 1987; 58:535-542.
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