



A tribute to Professor Per-Ingvar Brånemark



As most of you are aware, on 20 December 2014, Professor Per-Ingvar Brånemark sadly left us. The internet and dental journals are flooded with tributes, and I feel that I have to join them in their commemoration given that he had a major impact on my life. I did not know him well. I only met him four times in my life, despite working for more than 15 years in Göteborg, in his department, under the supervision of one of the most brilliant researchers, Professor Peter Thomsen, who was an ex-PhD student of his. I have a good recollection of the second time when I meet him, as this was not accidental. It happened in 1997, after the publication of my first two 'semi-systematic' reviews on implant failures. These two papers (which was actually an overlong manuscript that was initially going to be published as a single paper) were pivotal for me, not only because of the substantial impact they had had at the time, but also because I was finally able to realise my research predisposition. Professor Ulf Lekholm, who at the time was Head of the Brånemark Clinic

in Göteborg, called me saying that Professor Brånemark wanted to speak to me in person. A sort of private audience. It was the same feeling a young priest from the countryside experiences when they have been summoned by the Pope for a personal conversation. I was completely surprised by this request, but once there, I realised that he was just curious to know who was this young PhD student courageous enough to write an entire PhD project on implant failures, mostly focused on failed implants bearing his name. In retrospect I would have done the same in his position. This was my opportunity to get to know him and he actually did make an impression on me. My impression was that of an intelligent but strict individual with a dominant personality. He had a sharp and penetrating eye and was very self-confident. His collaborators revered and adored him. While this would be normal in a country like Italy, it was rather unusual in a highly democratic country such as Sweden.

I would like to be frank and I would like to share my thoughts about him. As a writer of scientific articles I was never impressed; the methodology he used was not very rigorous from a scientific point of view, but he possessed two important virtues, which made him unique. He was able to think laterally and think "outside of the box". This allowed him to understand the incredible potential of the casual observation he carried out while using titanium chambers in animal bones during the study of vital circulation. He suddenly understood that the ability of the bone to integrate with titanium could be successfully exploited in dentistry and orthopedics. This idea was proposed against the accepted idea at the time that dental implants had to be fibrointegrated, i.e. supported by a periodontal ligament, which in reality was a dense connective tissue, typical of a scar, that had nothing in common with a highly specialised

Marco Esposito, DDS, PhD

Freelance researcher and Associate Professor, Department of Biomaterials, The Sahlgrenska Academy at Göteborg University, Göteborg, Sweden

and functional tissue, such as the periodontal ligament. What now seems to be a banal concept, I can assure you at the time was a particularly ingenious idea. It was a turning point in dentistry, although it took about 20 years to be fully accepted amongst the dental community. This example shows, once more, how difficult it can be to challenge accepted ideas. This revolution was definitely the most important innovation in dentistry in the last 50 years. The second virtue of Per-Ingvar is not less relevant: in life it is not enough to have ingenious intuitions, we also need to be able to implement them. All of us have brilliant intuitions, but just a few of us are able to put them into practice.

Per-Ingvar possessed at least two fundamental talents, which must be entered into history: a limitless intuitive/revolutionary capacity together with the organisational ability and the determination to implement change. Per-Ingvar you were a great man, you changed our way of thinking and you changed clinical procedures at a global level, but moreover you improved the quality of life for millions of individuals giving many a second chance, with regard to cases of tooth loss. We miss you and your incredible talents.

Happy reading
Marco

