

On Enduring Visions: Peter Schärer's and the International College of Prosthodontists



Professor Peter Schärer, DMD, MS

The German poet Goethe observed that teaching is a mysterious art, since knowledge cannot be put in a mind like coins in a bag. Teaching is really all about preparing others for the learning they must do themselves. At our best, we clinical teachers are intellectual couriers delivering accurate, and often provocative, news, which translates into gratifying deeds for our patients. And while our deeds are unlikely to measurably prolong our patients' lives, we most certainly enrich them. This remains the unique mission of the prosthodontic scholar, one which Peter Schärer fulfilled at a national and international leadership standard in an exemplary fashion.

Professor Schärer was chairman of the Department of Prosthodontics and Dental Materials, as well as dean of the Dental School at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, where he was the first dentist dean of the Medical Faculty. His initial clinical studies in Zurich were followed by graduate work at the Eastman Dental Center at Rochester, New York, and a research year at Osaka University in Japan. In 1972 he became a full professor at the University of Zurich and retired in the fall of 2000 when he was director of the Centre of Dentistry

and Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery. He has also held faculty positions at the Dental School of the University of Japan at Osaka and the Dental School of the University of Berne, Switzerland. He lectured internationally on prosthodontics and is a past president of the European Academy of Gnathology, the International College of Prosthodontists, and the European Academy of Esthetic Dentistry.

I had phoned him early last fall to wish him well and to thank him for his very gracious letter on the occasion of my retirement earlier in the year. I also asked him if he would agree to an *IJP* interview with Professor Carlo Marinello in an effort to share his insights with an even wider international readership. He immediately and enthusiastically approved of my request and talked optimistically about being well enough to meet us all in Crete in 2005 and participate in the ICP's forthcoming Greek experience. Regrettably his health deteriorated and the hoped-for living tribute became a memorial homage instead. We are all diminished when a good and gifted leader dies. Yet we also remain grateful for all that he stood for and brought to prosthodontics, and the fact that many of us around the world are better at what we

do in the discipline for having known him.

It is also important that this journal's readers should remember Professor Schärer. He was a co-founder of the International College of Prosthodontists whose official publication our journal is. He followed Dr Harold Preiskel as the ICP's second president, and he too was convinced that this publication should be an excellent partner for expanding the scholarly scope of our prosthodontic mission in all its three determinants—education, research, and service to patients.

With his invaluable help, the ICP evolved into the forum of international prosthodontic scholarship it is today. In fact, the ICP has to date avoided the temptation to presume that it has a direct role to play in any of those determinants which comprise its mandate. Its role remains thankfully an indirect one, arguably the College's most important: biennial opportunities for the highest quality of debate and personal information exchanges. This does not, of course, preclude the development of other future agendas. However, the ICP continues to offer the best scope for looking beyond the hegemonous structures which all too often (albeit necessarily) dominate our individual and academic professional careers in different countries. Reaching out to international colleagues in the joint pursuit of prosthodontic scholarship remains our unique form of advancing intraoral architecture—as well as a compelling reason for joining the ICP and attending the forthcoming May 25–28, 2005, meeting in Crete.

ICP meetings are now hugely successful international events. The first meeting was a half-day guest spot on the coattails of the American College of Prosthodontists meeting in Seattle, Washington, in 1985, and subsequent independent meetings were held at Lucerne, Hiroshima, Burgenstock, San Diego, Toronto, Malta, Stockholm, Sydney, and Halifax. The scientific program for Crete looks superb, and the choice of a Greek venue is an inspired one. Greece continues to enchant the imagination, particularly in those of us in western countries. Perhaps this is because the centrer of Greek outlook has always included an unshakeable belief in the worth of the individual, a conviction that a man must be honored for his individual worth and respected because he is himself. Greek geography, whereby every district was separated from the next by mountain or sea, was partially responsible for forcing the early Greeks to be masters of a whole range of crafts and accomplishments. And history books teach us that the Greeks'

sense of personal achievement led them to make things with the same degree of passion they brought to the structure of their political life. Consequently, anything worth doing was worth doing well, as evidenced by all the little masterpieces of relief design in coins and signature seals and numerous extraordinary artistic and architectural artefacts. I may be stretching a point here, but it is tempting to draw parallels between the Greek spirit, our collective approach to a discipline whose name also happens to have a Greek origin, and much of what individuals like Peter Schärer stood for.

He was, after all, a singularly Swiss scholar. He personified discipline and excellence, passion and humanity, and a profound understanding of man's frailties. While such qualities are not unique to any nationality, they are often regarded as integral aspects of the classical Greek spirit. Hence my search for a suitable Greek quote to end my editorial tribute to our friend. I found it in a poem¹ by Giorgos Seferis, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1963.

"All I want is to speak simply; for this grace I pray.
For we have loaded even the song with so many kinds
of music
That gradually it sinks.
And our art we so decorated that beneath the gilt
Its face is eaten away.
And it is now time for us to say the few words we have
to say
Because tomorrow our soul sets sail."

The accompanying tribute was adapted from the one written and read by Professor Carlo Marinello at Peter Schärer's funeral. It was co-authored by Professors Urs Belser and Jörg Strub who, together, are three very special beneficiaries of Professor Schärer's scholarly commitment. It remains a moving and compelling reminder of our discipline's indebtedness to a leader who has made a difference.

1. Seferis G. An old man on the river bank. In: Poems, Warner R (translator). Boston-Toronto: Little Brown, 1960.

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