**Professor Newell W. Johnson**

A dedicated long-term researcher and gifted communicator, the late Professor Newell Johnston was a distinguished President of The British Society of Periodontology and made notable contributions over many years to the theoretical underpinning of our specialty.

He obtained his BDSc in 1961 and his MDSc in 1963, both from the University of Melbourne Australia. At the University of Bristol England, he completed his PhD. The MRC Dental Research Unit at Bristol was a world leader in dental caries research and unsurprisingly that was the area of his PhD topic. Exceptionally, during his early years in academia he began to produce several high-quality publications each year, a pattern continued throughout his long career, even as an octogenarian. Eventually he was recruited to the Oral Pathology Department of Dental School of the London Hospital Medical College, Whitechapel, (now part of QMUL), with the elevated rank of Reader. Subsequent events proved the unusually senior appointment to have been an inspired choice.

Those of us at “The London” at the time met a very confident urbane Australian with a cheerful demeanor. The most negative emotion he exhibited was puzzled exasperation. However, the tough aspects of Sir Les Patterson were not far beneath the surface, (Newell did a great impersonation of the fictional character). He was a crystal-clear thinker with strong positive convictions and boundless aspirations for his calling. At one of our earliest meetings, he confided to me that as a teenager he had 'hitch hiked' to London from Australia to stand in the crowds on Coronation Day 1953. If it were true, the mind boggles.

Later I learned he pursued periodontal research before his hard tissue work at Bristol. For his Master's dissertation completed 1963 he had studied Plasma Cells in gingival tissue. That triggered my interest and surprise because although the plasma cell was described in 1875 by the anatomist Heinrich H. von Hartz-Waldeyer, only in the early 1960s was the startling observation made that plasma cells were activated blood small lymphocytes. It was a key discovery which initiated huge advances in immunology. Imagine a Masters' dental student choosing an ongoing research sensation as topic for his dissertation!

The periodontal precocity was to bear fruit because his regular three to four high quality publications each year began to include periodontology studies as well as those of dental caries. Not surprisingly some papers involved histological observations of inflamed gingiva. That he devoted part of his time to periodontal research and discussing his ideas was a great benefit to we 'wet-fingered', (gloving only arrived in the late 1980's), periodontists.

Newell immediately won his place among the four to five senior professors who were proposing and then implementing a radical approach to undergraduate dental education at “The London.” The topics of his ongoing quota of annual publications became four, namely dental caries and periodontal diseases as noted, now dental education and later oral malignancy. The latter topic got more of his attention during the later part of his life. But education and curriculum content were an abiding interest and part of his lasting legacy includes an increased status of Periodontology in the dental undergraduate curriculum.

He became Professor of Oral Pathology and was appointed simultaneously to be the Honorary Director of Medical Research Council Dental Research Unit. London and the Nuffield Research Professor of Dental Sciences, Royal College of Surgeons England.

It was generally agreed that the MRC Unit would address periodontal issues and Newall began to energetically propose that the term Chronic Periodontal Disease was concealing several distinctive varieties of the condition. The resources he secured, (a galaxy of Oral Microbiologists, excellent statistical advice and opportunities to work on techniques like the Florida Probe), enabled him to exhaustively test the hypothesis. The eventual negative outcome was no less consequential for periodontal care than a positive one would have been. It settled that periodontal therapy would continue as previously, being primarily plaque control- based, for at least for another generation.

At this point I should conclude my personal thoughts, leaving it for others to outline his later towering achievements. In 1993 he transferred to the Dental School of Kings College London as Professor of Oral Medicine and Pathology and during his tenure was elected to The Academy of Medicine and created a Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George by HM the Queen. Eventually the call back to Australia came and he was appointed Foundation Dean of the School of Dentistry and Oral Health of Griffiths University.

Professor Johnson is the role model par excellence for young dental academics seeking to make the world a better place. It is fitting there is an IADR Travel Award in his name reflecting his caring and kindly mentorship, just one of his many attractive qualities.

F. C. Smales

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