Guest Editorial

Dr G Herbert Hanson
In Memory – An appreciation

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The orthodontic profession lost a great visionary and inventor when Dr G Herbert Hanson passed away on May 15, 2012 at the age of 78. In the world of orthodontics many referred to Herb as “The Father of Self-Ligation.” He devoted practically his entire 50 year professional life to the development and refinement of the self-ligating SPEED Appliance. It is thus not a strange phenomenon that his appliance is now widely emulated; he truly made an enormous contribution to the orthodontic profession.

Dr Hanson was born in Redditt, Ontario, Canada. He lived with his parents in various wilderness locations on the Canadian National Railway Northline where his early education was largely by correspondence with classes occurring one week per month in what was known as the “school car”; a modified railway coach. In subsequent years, he attended schools in both Canada and the USA until his family settled in Southern Ontario.

He obtained degrees in Dentistry and Orthodontics at the University of Toronto. Throughout his professional career, Dr Hanson acknowledged his good fortune of having studied under Prof E Harvold and Prof D Woodside; both of whom had a profound influence on his orthodontic formation.

It was during his orthodontic graduate program, after observing a clinical instructor “steel tie” upper and lower arches, that Dr Hanson became convinced of the need for a self-ligating bracket. To enhance his understanding of metal working and metallurgy, he worked during his summers at the International Nickel Company, INCO.

In 1970, Dr Hanson purchased drafting equipment and began work on the design of prototypes for a new edgewise appliance. Although his primary goal was to eliminate the need for ligation, he was particularly focused on designing an appliance that would cooperate with the archwire in corrective tooth movement—the so called “Active” or “Inter-Active” self-ligating bracket. This was to become the SPEED appliance.

Dr Hanson approached Strite Industries Limited in 1975 to manufacture his appliance. With the help of this company they began the laborious task of design optimization. The first SPEED Spring Clips were “hand formed” by Dr Hanson from segmented watch springs. Brackets were welded “by hand” onto bands and placed selectively on patients to determine the viability of the evolving design. The design was first introduced to the profession in 1978 at the Great Lakes Association of Orthodontists Meeting. More than 600 patients had undergone full treatment with the SPEED appliance in Dr Hanson’s private practice at the time of its commercial introduction in 1980.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Dr Hanson spent much of his free time conveying, through lectures and journal articles, the merits of self-ligation and the SPEED design. He retired from private practice in 2002 but remained engaged in orthodontic product development throughout his retirement.

Like all true inventors, Dr Hanson preferred the workshop to the limelight and was most at home tinkering with his various patented inventions. He will be remembered as a kind, generous and loving gentleman who showed great enthusiasm for life and his profession. He enjoyed nature hikes, classical music and spending time with family. He is survived by his beloved wife Evelyn and his children Karen, Eric, and Christine.

The author wishes to thank Mr Richard Strite of Cambridge, Ontario, for sharing his personal experiences from his long professional relationship with Dr Hanson.