

Commentary on the Death of Dr Harold T. Perry, Jr

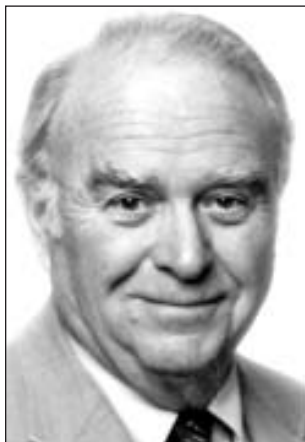
Harold (Hal) Perry, Jr, DDS, PhD, died February 3, 2012, at the age of 86, in Florence, Oregon. He was a founding member of the American Academy of Orofacial Pain (AAOP), originally called the American Academy of Craniomandibular Disorders (AACD) when it was established in 1975, and was the first editor of the *Journal of Orofacial Pain*. Hal and his late wife, Lynn, had moved to Florence after his retirement from Northwestern University Dental School to live near their son, Ty, and his family.

It is hard to summarize the life and contributions of a major figure like Hal Perry in a brief commentary like this. I had the privilege of working side-by-side with Hal for 10 years at Northwestern University, and they were truly amazing years of collegiality.

It would be fair to say that Hal's career in the temporomandibular disorders (TMD) world mirrored the evolution of that field in the last half of the 20th century. He entered the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) field early in his academic training as he pursued advanced degrees after completing his orthodontic residency. His postgraduate studies included the embryology of the TMJ and the electromyographic study of muscle function in normal subjects and TMD patients, and he ended up being one of the few orthodontists at that time with a scientific PhD degree. The value of all this advanced training became apparent as he began to teach generations of orthodontic students over 40+ years and as he expanded his interests in the TMJ field.

Hal's clinical interests in the TMJ came initially from his mentor, Dr J.R. Thompson, and they worked together on many projects as he joined the faculty at Northwestern. His former colleagues and students all remember him with great fondness, because in addition to being an incredible source of knowledge, he was also a warm and caring person to everybody he encountered. After buying Dr Thompson's practice in Elgin, IL, he continued his dual career of private practice and academics with great energy, and he served as chairman of the Department of Orthodontics for more than 25 years. Dr Perry lectured on every continent except Antarctica and published extensively. He was a member of eight dental organizations and served as a chairman, consultant, editor, contributor, and organizer in 19 different professional appointments.

In this brief piece I want to focus on Hal Perry's contributions to the transition of the TMD field from a "mechanical" dental discipline to a more holistic patient-centered field, in which the twin issues of the biology and psychology of pain began to be understood around the world. He was the president of AACD, today's AAOP, in 1981-82. Initially this group was composed of a mixture of experienced and knowledgeable academic and clinical people who felt that the prevailing occlusal viewpoints about TMD were



too narrow and too rigid. In 1988, Hal Perry and other Academy members met at his hunting lodge for several days, where they developed a White Paper on TMD, which eventually became the first edition of the AAOP Guidelines.

Perhaps the most significant contribution that Hal Perry made to the TMD community around the world was his acceptance of the invitation in 1987 to become the first editor of the *Journal of Orofacial Pain*. Originally the *Journal of Craniomandibular Disorders – Facial and Oral Pain*, the name was changed when the AACD became the AAOP. This journal was the official organ of the American and European Academies,

and over the years it has expanded to include the Asian, Australian & New Zealand, and Ibero-Latin Academies as well. Hal served in this position until 1994, and during those years the journal built a well-deserved reputation for presenting a quality mixture of clinical and scientific papers on a variety of pain-related topics. One of the most notable issues during his tenure was the special volume in 1992 introducing the Research Diagnostic Criteria for TMD to the world.

During the 1980s, while he was deeply involved in the activities of the new Academy, writing the first White Paper, and starting up the new journal, Hal also was undergoing a personal change in his approach to TMD patients. When I began working with him at Northwestern in 1986, he was already thinking in terms of pain neurophysiology and conservative treatments, and he was very interested in the emerging biopsychosocial perspectives in our field. I used to refer to him as "The Human Placebo," because his empathetic interactions with TMD patients practically guaranteed a good outcome. I jokingly told him that, if we tried to conduct a controlled clinical trial there, he would have to be excluded from the research team! As editor of the journal, he saw first-hand how the research focus was changing as the TMD field morphed into becoming the orofacial pain field, and he was a great admirer of the researchers—especially the basic scientists—who were pushing this field forward.

So I think we can summarize Hal Perry's professional career by saying that he was one of those unique larger-than-life figures who can straddle multiple worlds and still do everything extremely well. His impact on both the orthodontic world and the orofacial pain world will be long-lasting, and his loss is significant for all of us who knew him and benefited from that relationship. As Jeff Okeson said when he heard about Hal's passing: "Hal was a remarkable man, both professionally and personally. He was admired and loved by everyone he met. We lost a giant."

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