Colin Hall Dexter  

Tribute by Sally Goss

It is with huge sadness that I write this short tribute to COLIN HALL DEXTER having learned of his death on 6th July.

Sometimes in life you get lucky – and my luck was in meeting Colin Hall Dexter. I’d been to his lectures and marvelled at how someone could be so amusing and yet get across his very serious message about Prevention. At times I cried with laughter at his words yet to this very day I can remember all that he said (in particular the ‘Fruit Index of Periodontal Disease’ and ‘Architectural Classification of Dental Overhangs’) whilst lectures from other so-called eminent speakers have disappeared into the mists of time. And then I started work as the hygienist in his practice in Harley Street – it quite literally changed my life. His support and admiration for the work of dental hygienists knew no bounds. And he was a man so far ahead of his time with his skill in getting the preventive message over to patients. These days we hear people heralding ‘a new approach’. Co-diagnosis? – We did it 30 years ago in Colin’s practice. Helping patients’ to understand their own role in controlling dental disease? - We did it 30 years ago. Hygienists having an assistant to enable them to work more efficiently and effectively? - We did it 30 years ago. I could go on and on. Since Colin retired I have heard nothing new about the Preventive message – I’d already learnt it all from Colin.

Life around Colin was tremendous fun. He could light up a room with his energy and dynamism. This enthusiasm for life allowed him to encompass so many roles. To briefly attempt to touch on them all: he was instrumental in setting up the British Dental Health Foundation and in later years became the Chairman twice. He ran the Gibbs Oral Hygiene Service, and later on the UK division of Mentadent, developing many dental health products which are still in use to this day. He was involved in establishing one of the early Corporates, Dencare. He ran memorable courses for dentists in Majorca and in his very successful practice in Harley Street. His Christmas parties were legendary. He loved food, he loved wine and he loved France. But more than anything, even more than dentistry, he loved music and he eventually retired from dentistry so that he could spend more time composing. His efforts were brought to life on 2 CDs which he released privately to family and friends.

I feel enormously privileged to have known Colin. He was a funny, kind and most generous man. The last of the truly great characters in dentistry has gone. We will all miss him.
Colin Hall Dexter  

Tribute by Nigel Carter

The passing of **COLIN HALL DEXTER** sees the demise of a legend in Preventive Dentistry and a true friend and lifelong supporter of the British Dental Health Foundation from when he helped to set it up in 1971.

It is a great shame that Colin did not live to see some of his ideas on a preventative approach to Dentistry being implemented in the Health Service with the new dental contract. Colin was a pioneer of the Preventive approach but had to leave the health service to implement it. He would be delighted that this approach is now being mainstreamed into patient care.

Like several generations of dentists I was privileged to hear his inspirational lectures on Prevention, first at the Insight Group run by Kevin Lewis in Peterborough in the 1970s. His enthusiasm, humour and caring approach were a catalyst for many to improve their practices and their service to patients.

Colin was influential in establishing the British Dental Health Foundation with the mission of getting the message to the public that tooth loss was not inevitable and that teeth could be for life. This is an era when 38% of the adult population had full dentures and the expectation was for total tooth loss by middle age.

He served not one but two terms as Chairman of the Foundation and I was privileged to work with him during that period. As a relatively newly qualified dentist his passion and enthusiasm inspired me as to the value of the Foundation in spreading the method of oral health which has remained my lifelong interest. I remember many meeting of the Executive and Finance Committee of the Foundation held in Colin’s Harley Street waiting room where we worked out how to find the next tranche of money for the then infant and struggling charity.

Colin was larger than life character and will be missed by many but his legacy will live on as the Foundation takes his principles and tries to implement them across the world.

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Colin Hall Dexter  

Tribute by Bruce Mayhew

**COLIN HALL DEXTER** was an amazing man and many dentists changed their whole philosophy on dentistry after listening to him and as a result he changed hundreds of dentists’ lives.

He was instrumental in introducing me to Prevention in the late 60's when the words plaque and private dentistry were rarely if ever heard. We were all too busy tackling the mountain of decay that existed then, no fluoride in toothpaste, so doing quadrant dentistry was commonplace, rows of MOD’s and F/F’s. Thank goodness things have changed.
Basically his teaching was......... educate your patients to understand that dental disease is totally preventable and to do good dentistry under the NHS is impossible.

With this he moved his practice from the depths of Brixton to modern premises in Harley St. and it was here, in lecture halls and even a large group in Majorca that he motived us to change our tack and hundreds were enlightened and thank him to this day. Jocelyn, his secretary and Sally Goss his hygienist were also part of this inspirational team.

Several newspapers carried huge articles on his course 'Ethical low pressure salesmanship for dentists' and the GDC were incandescent with rage about it. What on earth is a dentist doing talking about selling?

But all he was saying was ' tell your patients about prevention and good dentistry in a way they can understand and they will eat out of your hand for life' and he was absolutely right. I as a result have had two full time hygienists for one dentist for 30-40 years, oh yes he showed me the light at the end of the dark NHS tunnel.

As an example of Colin’s generosity, on his 80th birthday at Chandos House he invited about 100 people to a slap up lunch and terrific entertainment and speeches and then a slap up tea. During the speeches from Gerry Dobbs, Kevin Lewis, Jocelyn and of course Colin there wasn't a dry eye in the place. Colin, rather old a dodderly by then but once on his feet and talking, he came alive and the Colin of old had us all transfixed and in awe.

Never before have I felt my tears dripping onto my knee, oh yes, Colin you really changed my life. Thank you.

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Colin Hall Dexter
Tribute by Graham Barnby

COLIN HALL DEXTER often described dentistry as a 40-year interruption in his chosen profession to be a musician. This interruption however allowed us the privilege of knowing and learning from probably the finest raconteur, mimic and lecturer in the UK. An abiding memory is his speech at the Leeds Castle BPS meeting that included a rewritten version of the George Formby “with my little all point probe in my hand” and accompanied himself on his ukulele.

Always a preventive dentist he led the way to get patients to look after themselves with the help of a hygienist and enthusiastic practice manager by bringing the patient into the preventive team.

Colin was in at the start of the BDHF being chairman twice in the days when the Foundation did not know where the next pound would come from. His enthusiasm for promoting health to the public allowed him to recruit similar people and companies onto the council leading to the BDHF becoming the strong organization it has become.
After retiring Colin went to live in Normandy where he had his own studio and where he produced 2 CD’s using young musicians from Trinity College.

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Colin Hall Dexter

Tribute by Lynn Walters

As with many other dentists qualifying around 1960, COLIN HALL DEXTER showed me the way from humdrum routine dentistry into a new world of high quality, exciting, prevention orientated treatment plans that opened a new chapter in my professional life. Being a master communicator himself, he taught us to communicate more effectively with our patients thereby encouraging them through education and understanding to play their part in achieving and maintaining their oral health.

The first time I really got to know Colin was when a small group of us who qualified from Guy’s (including Bruce Mayhew and the late Tony Parratt), attended one of his early courses which he had put together with George Hammerschmit. Although there was indeed a “selling” element in it, I prefer to recall it as an awareness raising programme, in that if we did not put across our oral health message in an effective and understandable way, we could not expect our patients to grasp the importance of what we were trying to do for them and thereby play their part. Any thought we may have had of a week-end “swan” were soon dispelled. I remember we arrived at the appointed hotel near Swindon on a Friday evening, and before we had time to turn round, we found ourselves in the first session clutching sheaves of course notes which we were expected to read, learn, and inwardly digest by the following morning. Thereafter, session followed session at a whirlwind pace fuelled by Colin’s unbounded enthusiasm and expertise in his subject matter.

Colin had a delightful sense of humour and lit up any room he entered. He loved a party, and those he held in his rooms in Harley Street each Christmas were not to be missed under any circumstances. His 80th birthday party at Chandos House in London was a grand gesture of generosity to all who attended. It had to be an emotional occasion, and did not disappoint.

I remember Colin as a mentor of unbounded enthusiasm in all that he did; a cultured man, and a true friend. He touched many lives, and it was a privilege to have known him.

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Colin Hall Dexter

Tribute by Jocelyn Sampson

COLIN HALL DEXTER was probably the best friend I ever had, and he had the most incredibly influence on my life. While wanting to cry because he has died, remembering him is actually making me laugh. He made people happy just by being with them, but once he started telling stories the laughter usually became uncontrollable. I remember a new patient standing at the door saying “I’ve never heard laughter in a dental practice before”.
One of his stories was that his Road to Damascus conversion had actually been on the Road to Tooting Bec, but nonetheless he went down on his knees then and there and renounced the evils of drill and fill dentistry. He wanted dentists to tell their patients about prevention, and started the “Ethical Low Pressure Salesmanship for Dentists” seminars with George Hammerschmidt. They made him deeply unpopular with the entrenched views of the establishment, but enthused and motivated a lot of forward thinking colleagues. Colin and I ran the “Private Practice: Why and How” seminars later. He ‘sold’ just by believing in his product and all his staff believed in him totally.

As his practice manager at 20 Harley Street my only job specification was “organise things how you like, but don’t upset my technician”. Until I met him I had only had experience of hospital and conventional practices, but he opened my eyes to the joys preventive dentistry and how a practice could be different. Being different was so important to him - we had to be nicer, kinder, better, and go 2 extra miles for our patients. All the treatment was based on prevention - dentist, hygienist and patient all working together - and how our patients loved having healthy mouths and keeping their teeth!

His patients genuinely loved him for his kindness and gentleness, and of course his superb clinical skills.

The news of his impending retirement in 1994 reduced virtually all his patients to tears.

We agreed on everything except music. It was not wise to speak the name Shostakovich in his hearing.

I loved him for so many reasons: for regularly asking me if he paid me enough (he did) but mostly for having confidence in me. In those long distant pre-CQC days I once did a temporary Kalzinol restoration for a patient while Colin was away from the practice. When the patient returned a few days later, Colin checked the tooth and told him “I couldn’t have done it better myself, we’ll leave it as it is”. For that I am still grateful to this day.

He was a rare and wonderful man.