



Professor Gil Alves Pessanha Alcoforado: «Improvement in dentistry doesn't have boundaries!»

In the DentArt Living Room today Professor, Dr. Gil Alves Pessanha Alcoforado from Portugal, known to the dental community as scientific research in periodontology and implant rehabilitation, lecturing at some of the most reputable universities in the dental area in Europe and USA and active volunteer work in developing countries.

Professor Gil Alcoforado is a President of the European Section of the International College of Dentists, the Chairman of the Philip Dear Foundation. He was also the founder and former President of the Portuguese Periodontal Society, as well as founder and former President of the European Federation of Periodontology. A past chairman of the Iberian section, he is currently a Fellow of the International Team for Implantology and a Fellow of the Pierre Fauchard Academy and the American College of Dentists.



In dentistry, my Father was a pioneer in many ways ...

– Dear Professor Alcoforado, now you are the President of European Section of the International College of Dentists, and we know that your father Gil Alcoforado Snr stood at the founding of the European Section of the ICD ... Do you know how it was?

– Following my Father's footsteps in the ICD and in life in general was rather challenging. My Father was a pioneer in his time in many ways. He introduced ceramics in Portugal but did not incorporate into his own office and dental lab (he had already, in the early sixties, two lab technicians working for him full time) until he mastered the technique himself. This was just one example of his vision within the profession.

The ICD was, in the mid-fifties, almost unknown in Europe. In 1955 he was invited by one of his old Professors from the University of Geneva, where he received his DDS degree after his MD degree from Coimbra University in Portugal, Professor Francois Ackermann. He invited my Father to a meeting in Amsterdam. During that Dental meeting some of the American Fellows from the Central Office of the ICD, organized an induction ceremony where three dentists were inducted as Fellows of the ICD; one of these three was my Father. In order to attend this meeting, my Father almost missed my birth since I was born fifteen days later in Lisbon.

This was the year when the European Section of the ICD was created...

Contrary to my family's preferences, I did not become a foundry engineer

– Since your Father was a famous dentist, then you had no choice, whether to become a dentist yourself? How did this happen to you, how did you become a dentist?

Actually my Father tried hard to convince me to take up a degree in Engineering since my Mother's Family had a foundry and I was supposed to be a part of the family business. Somewhat against my family's preference, I went on to start Medical school



in October 1973. In April 25th 1974, Portugal had a revolution and the life in the country suffered great disruption. Thanks to the opening of a democratic system, the Norwegian government helped the country by the opening of big hospital in the north of the country as well as two dental schools, one in Lisbon and one in Porto. Since I was finishing the third year of medicine, I signed up to the brand new dental school and I was accepted. I did three more years of dental school and I graduated in June 1980. A year later, I received a grant from the Norwegian government and I moved to Bergen to take a three years course in Periodontology which I finished in two years.

After returning to Portugal, I started practicing as a general dentist and, in January of 1987, I limited my practice to Periodontology. Later, I was invited as Visiting Professor to the University of Pennsylvania for a year, at later at the University of Michigan for



Father and son. 2014.



Gil with Father and Mother Maria Helena. 2018.



With Professor Jorgen Slots. 1990.

another full year where I did research, some post-graduate teaching as well as used the extra time to develop other dental skills. For a certain number of years, I spent my summer holidays at the University of Southern California to do more research with one of my mentors, Professor Jorgen Slots.

– ***Has anyone else chosen dentistry as their profession in your family?***

– Fortunately, Dentistry has spread into the Family since my nephew Miguel took on my Father's practice and my daughter Isabel finished dental school one year ago and she is now working in my office and teaching Operative dentistry at the Egas Moniz University where I am Dean.

We should look at Dentistry through a biological approach

– ***We know you as a leader in the world of periodontics, and not only ... What has been your scientific research recently?***

At the university, we are developing a center of excellence to study Periodontitis and Periimplantitis. In order to upgrade our research level, I have recently invited Professor Bjorn Klinge to become a part-time Faculty member. We are in the process of establishing close relationships with several Periodontal Departments, namely from the Universities of Karolinska and Malmo in Sweden and Leuven in Belgium. Parallel to the research, I have

recently established a Post-Graduate Implant Course which consists of eleven modules. We have several top quality Portuguese Professors and some World-class renowned Clinicians like Professors Matteo Chiapasco, Marc Quirynen, Fouad Khoury and Markus Hurzeler.

– ***You teach at universities in Europe and the USA, you know the systems of dental education in many countries. What is the best national system for training dentists, in your opinion, and why?***

– After visiting and working in many different



Gil Alcoforado received a special award for oral hygiene Oral Health Prize: Life Award. September 2016. Cascais, Portugal.



Professor Argirios Pissiotis transfers the presidential powers to Professor Gil Alcoforado. Thessaloniki, 2019.

countries and education systems, I have realized that there are good and not so good areas in all the universities I have worked in. However, I must say that I was greatly influenced by the biological approach of the Scandinavian system. Nowadays, I think this is quite normal in most countries and in their dental systems of education. I can guarantee that this was not something that existed everywhere. We should look at Dentistry through a biological approach which, for me, is the only system which makes sense. Dentistry should also have, obviously, a lot of practical work. However, that work should be well founded in biologic principles and evidence-based science. It turns out that this makes the work in patient's mouth much more interesting.

More money and effort needs to be invested in primary prevention

– With a volunteer mission, you have visited many developing countries teaching children oral hygiene. This is a very interesting and valuable experience, and also a testament to the nobility of your heart. How did these projects change your understanding of dental health?

– All these projects are small drops in a big ocean. But the ocean is made up of drops... When I participate in some of these projects, I feel good, but I also feel «small». I have encountered so many people who have little to nothing and still share with others what little they have. It is enriching and it puts

things into perspective. I would like to have more time to take part in more of these projects. We should not talk about taking part in humanitarian projects as altruistic since we probably get much more than we give to those populations. I am a great believer in preventive oral health and prevention in general. States should put more emphasis on



Ana and Gil Alcoforado.

■ Living room



Humanitarian project of the ICD and NGO «Smiling world» in São Tomé and Príncipe (Central Africa). The ICD, through its Philip Dear Foundation, partially supported this Oral Health Program. This made it possible, in particular, to carry out primary prevention and treatment of children from 6 to 10 years old in most schools in the city of Sao Tome, the capital of Sao Tome and Principe.

primary prevention. Unfortunately, for politicians, prevention does not have a quick pay off. The results of prevention are not sufficiently fast to affect re-election. Considering that primary prevention in our field (and others, of course) is less costly and more effective, it is a wonder why these measures are not taken more often into the political programs of the governments all over the world?

– Is the population in your native Portugal responsible for oral hygiene? What should dentists do and what should the state do to raise the culture of dental care in every patient and in the general population?

– The dental literacy has increased tremendously in the last few decades in Portugal. However, it is still not up to par. Again, more money and effort should be put into primary prevention. We would not be inventing anything new. We just have to observe the results of such programs in Scandinavia and in Switzerland. Some of these countries were extremely successful in greatly reducing the rate of caries with well design preventive programs. We know that with very effective tooth brushing and professional preventing measures we are able to almost eradicate caries and periodontal disease. Following the works of Axelsson, Lindhe, Nyman and others, research published in the seventies and later on, showed us that it is possible to control those diseases. Unfortunately, the «modern» dental world looks at those investigations and feel that they are not «sexy», or too simple... Yes, they are simple, but they work. I have always based my practice of those principles and this is probably why I do fewer extractions and have less periimplantitis cases. A lot more could be written on this extremely important subject...

– How does your clinic – Alcoforado Clinic – are working in a long long pandemic?

– In March 2020 I closed the office a few days, the Government issued the order to close down. We stayed closed for two full months. During this period we went to the office only for emergencies. After that period, we started working with all the protective measures possible. I suppose we will keep using them for many years to come.

– Ensuring dental health of the population is a function of the state! And what can do public



The conclusion of the congress of the European Association for Osseointegration, which brought together 4500 participants from 89 countries. September 2019 Lisbon, Portugal.

professional organizations for the dental health of the population?

– Unfortunately, in Portugal the State does very little to solve the oral health problems of the population. The State gives dental cheques (150€/year) to some minority groups: children, pregnant women and the senior population who come from underprivileged families. Again, States chooses the wrong area to help. Instead of promoting preventive oral treatments, they prefer to use curative approaches.

I belong to the ONG «Mundo-a-Sorrir» «Smiling World» which has several projects both in Portugal and different countries in Africa, namely Sro Tomй & Prнncipe, Guинй-Bissau and Cape Verde.

Our main goal is to promote dental primary prevention to local populations, in schools, elderly homes, and other institutions. Secondly, we have several clinics which do dental treatments to underprivileged populations. We have clinics in Porto, Braga, Lisbon and Cascais, all in Portugal and one which opened recently in Guинй-Bissau. These clinics work solely with the help of volunteer dentists. We have donations of dental materials from dental suppliers and prosthetic work from some dental technicians.

I wish my colleagues to love their work as much as I love mine!

– **Universities, the clinic, international conferences, volunteer trips to different countries require a lot of energy ... What gives you the strength**



Gil Alcoforado at the 2019 European Championships in Greece.

to cope with the load? What are your hobbies, besides periodontology and implantation?

– Passion. I love my work, both clinical and the University. Obviously, I would prefer to have more time for humanitarian projects. I have said all my life that I must change and need to slow down. The results have not been very good so far, I have to say. I have a hard time in saying «no», I guess.

I love to play golf but recently I have returned to a love of my youth: waterskiing. I am preparing to go to the European Championships in September in Italy, obviously in the «Jurassic Class», +65years old. My main goal is to participate and, if possible, not to be last!

– What would you wish the readers of the DentArt magazine?

– I would like to wish them to love their work as I love mine. And do not forget: the day you do not wish to learn something new or gain more proficiency in some kind of procedure, is the day you are ready to retire!

I am giving a lot of courses, but I have recently gone to Munich to learn a few new techniques and improve in others where I was already proficient.

You can ALWAYS further develop your skills. Improvement does not have boundaries.

*Interviewed by Hanna Antypovych
and Serhiy Radlinsky
Photo from Gil Alcoforado*



The return to the sports hobbies of youth gives unforgettable moments of joy, triumph, self-confidence!