

Anthony Henry Melcher

Anthony Henry Melcher was born in Johannesburg in 1927. He enrolled in the Faculty of Dentistry of the University of the Witwatersrand in 1945 and graduated with a Bachelor of Dental Surgery degree in 1949. He joined his father in general dental practice in Johannesburg, a family partnership that was to last for twelve years.

Anthony Melcher's academic calling manifested early, so that within two years of qualifying he offered his services to the Faculty of Dentistry in an honorary capacity and became a part-time clinical demonstrator. Initially his duties were restorative dentistry but he became more and more intrigued by the new discipline of periodontology, which concerns the maintainance of the health of the supporting tissues of teeth. Melcher was also fascinated by the healing response of bone, which is an integral part of periodontology. He shared this basic science interest with Professor James Irving, Director of the then recently established Joint Dental Research Unit of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and the University (the predecessor of the present Medical Research Council/Wits Dental Research Institute). With no urging needed from Irving, Melcher began to do research in a part-time capacity into the healing defects in bone. This culminated in a Master of Dental Surgery degree in 1960. (This quaintly named doctoral level degree was replaced some years later in the faculty by the more conventional PhD).

As soon as didactic postgraduate education began in the Faculty, Anthony Melcher enrolled to complete, in 1958, the Higher Diploma in Dentistry, the only clinical postgraduate qualification in South Africa at the time. Thereafter he introduced the first formal teaching in periodontics at undergraduate and postgraduate level at Wits and in South Africa.

By that time Melcher had gone as far as he could in periodontics in South Africa. In 1962 he left Wits and Johannesburg for London, where he became a Research Fellow in the Institute of Dental Surgery of the University of London, the leading centre for periodontics in the United Kingdom. Three years later, in 1964, a Doctor of Philosophy degree was awarded to him and he was appointed Leverhulme Research Fellow and senior lecturer in the Department of Dental Science at the Royal College of Surgeons in London. At the same time he was made a visiting scientist in the Tissue and Organ Culture Unit of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund. Through this his clinical skills were enhanced by a solid grounding in basic science.

Melcher remained in London to research tissue responses to periodontal disease until 1969, when he was recruited by the University of Toronto as a Professor of Dentistry responsible for periodontics. His research eminence and leadership qualities were recognised in 1973 when the Canadian Medical Research Council formed a group in Periodontal Physiology with Melcher as Director. To this day, this is the only dental research group established by the Canadian Medical Research Council.

The next change occurred in 1983, when Melcher was appointed Chairman of the Graduate Department of Dentistry at the University of Toronto; Director, Division of Postgraduate Dental Education in the Faculty of Dentistry and Associate Dean, Life Sciences, School of Graduate Studies, University of Toronto. A year later a Doctor of Science degree was conferred on him by the University of London.

Anthony Melcher's academic career reached its zenith in 1988, when he became Vice-Provost of the University of Toronto, an office he held until his retirement as Professor Emeritus in 1993.

In addition to his positions in universities, Melcher has held high office in other organisations. In 1982/1983 he was President of the International Association for Dental Research. He served on the Council of the Medical Research Council of Canada between 1984 and 1989 and on the Council's executive committee for the last two years. Other bodies on which he has held office are the National Institute for Dental Research in the USA and the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research and the Ontario Universities Health Research Committee in Canada.

During his years in academia Melcher remained in research, performing seminal investigations into the physiology and disease of periodontal tissues. He has published numerous peer-reviewed articles, has presented many papers at congresses and has trained and inspired a generation of young researchers in periodontology.

Throughout his career Melcher never lost contact with the dental school at his Alma Mater, Wits, or with other South African dental schools. He has returned to lecture and to offer research guidance, has acted as an external examiner for postgraduate research degrees, and has been a rallying person for South African dental graduates in North America.

Anthony Melcher has made striking advances in dental research, has promoted high standards of academic teaching and has brought honour to the University, to the dental profession and to South Africa. The University recognises the achievements of one of its own graduates in the course of a long and distinguished academic career by conferring on Anthony Henry Melcher its highest honour, the degree of Doctor of Science in Dentistry *honoris causa*.