



Charles M. "Charlie" Goldstein

# Remembering a Contemporary Dental Legend and Exemplary Humanitarian

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## AUTHORS

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*At a time in our society when we have a dearth of real heroes, it is this story of an individual whose lifework may be summed up in words such as "giving," "teacher," or "mentor" that gives us perspective and hope of what embodies a real hero. What's even more significant is that this hero was one of our own — a member of our profession, a member of CDA.*

*This tribute to Charles M. Goldstein details a life well-lived. It inspires and motivates us to look outside of ourselves and to think outside of the box. I am thankful I was personally able to call him a mentor, teacher, and colleague, and it is my hope that his message lives on for many generations to come through his mobile clinic. — Santos Cortez, Jr., DDS*

**M**any individuals have contributed to the development of the dental profession and the stature it achieved prior to the dawn of the 21st century.

Some names stand out more than others, as their contributions and accomplishments have been the subject of many stories and historical retrospectives. Pierre Fauchard, who was considered the Father of Modern Dentistry, was perhaps the first to provide a complete scientific description of dentistry, establishing it as a distinct scientifically based profession. His work, "The Surgeon Dentist," was used to train new dentists for a century after his death and he was credited with sharing his many discoveries with his colleagues.

Horace Hayden and Chapin Harris, the founders of the Baltimore College of Dental Surgery in February 1840, the first dental college in the world, are usually part of any discussion about dental legends. Greene Vardiman Black, who became the first dean of the Northwestern University Dental School, became an

extraordinary part of the history of the profession as a result of his research and writing that included such important works as “Classification of Dental Caries” and the “Principles of Tooth Preparation.”

Since the second half of the 20th century, it has been more difficult for any individual to have the same clear visibility in the historical development of the profession. In addition, a social consciousness within the dental profession has led to some new pathways for recognition that must be acknowledged. In response to the nationwide and statewide need for improvement of the oral health of underserved populations, there has been significant support from the organized profession and from individual dentists.

Given this background, there has been one modern-day dental pioneer who quietly contributed to, as well as spearheaded some of, this change, not in just the past decade when it has become more visible, but for most of the past four decades. Those who were involved in his efforts or touched by his efforts would agree that the impact of his work and his persona have been legendary, even though his accomplishments have not been widely recognized beyond the immediate sphere of his activities. That was not unusual for individuals who go quietly about their business of helping and educating others.

His name, simply, was “Charlie.” Charles Meyer Goldstein was 87 when he passed away, leaving behind several generations of dentist and health care colleagues whom he had taught, mentored, or befriended. He had also touched the lives of at least a few generations of children for whom he either improved access to care, or to whom he personally provided treatment through his humanitarian efforts dating back almost 40 years.

It is important to remember Charlie’s service efforts, as they addressed an

important facet of the dental profession’s increased responsibility to society, providing oral health education and dental treatment to those with little or no access to care. He did this in a variety of ways, always characterized by selfless service to others, despite his devotion to his family.

Perhaps the vehicle that provided the initial momentum for what would become his tireless humanitarian effort was his interest in education. In the spirit of Fauchard, his love of teaching what he knew to others probably led to his first faculty appointment at the University of Southern California’s School of Dentistry in 1959. What really ignited this superla-

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tive career came in 1970 when he was appointed director of the new USC Mobile Dental Clinic. His former students, many of whom would later become his colleagues and his associates, marveled at his lifelong love for the mobile clinic and the mentoring and the professional relationships that Charlie provided.

In the final analysis, he was a superb mentor. His advice and guidance to students and colleagues covered many important personal beliefs, from an uncompromising commitment to family, to service to the underserved. A few examples of how he conducted his practice and lived his life include, “I urge you to not overtreat. If it isn’t broken, don’t fix

it. No restoration looks as natural as a sound beautiful tooth. Please don’t sell dentistry; rather, inform and educate so that a patient understands the benefits and risks of treatment. Be a lifelong learner. You can never know it all. One of the best ways to learn is to teach.”

One current student, like many USC dental graduates who had come before him, after completing two community rotations and a mobile clinic rotation in which he had numerous experiences treating children, wrote an unsolicited statement praising his mobile clinic experience in comparison with the others. He specifically referred to his experience as “Charlie Goldstein’s Mobile Clinic.” He went on to say “without him and the tradition he kept alive, I may have not felt such passion in my future goals. His legend and the fine ambassadors of his mission (a reference to faculty, some of whom had been students of Charlie) shall forever keep this fire burning.”

In addition to providing an outstanding educational experience for the dental students, he did everything possible to advance the outreach and service to the communities the mobile clinic served. He raised monetary support for the clinic facilities and services, he personally provided dental care, and, of course, his mentoring of his young dentists is always mentioned with reverence and appreciation. Beyond that, he did most everything else associated with keeping the mobile clinic operating at a level of efficiency. Longtime associate Dr. Alvin Rosenblum said, “I’ve got photographs of him pushing a broom, hauling equipment; he really set an example!”

As the years passed, Charlie designed mobile dental equipment, from dental units to chairs, to facilitate not only mobility of operation, but the quality of care. He also was instrumental in designing the

vehicles that would house and transport the equipment. As one associate commented, “He was always thinking about ways to make it (the mobile clinic) better.”

In summary, he was involved in every facet of that program as it traveled throughout many underserved areas in counties throughout California from north to south, east to west. Many a day was spent in the San Joaquin Valley providing care for the children of farm workers.

Charlie’s humanitarian efforts reached well beyond the mobile clinic, although his impact may have been felt most strongly there. He also contributed to the establishment of a number of other important facilities, including the School of Dentistry at Tel Aviv University in the 1980s after he had provided care to Palestinian children in the 1970s. Closer to home, he helped establish Synanon in Santa Monica, dentistry at the Los Angeles Free Clinic, a dental clinic for Native Americans, and a USC-staffed dental clinic at the Union Rescue Mission in downtown Los Angeles.

In the latter, he was overseeing the clinic operation that included supervision of staff, faculty, and students; and, in addition, providing patient care, well into his 80s. In fact, his faculty role, which included his work with the Rescue Mission clinic and the mobile clinic, continued until his health deteriorated in the months before his death.

As his health continued to decline, this period in his life provided him the time to develop his “dream,” an effort to create the “Charlie Goldstein USC Mobile Clinic Fund,” and raise a \$4 million endowment to fund his plan to keep the mobile clinic functioning in perpetuity.

Charlie shared his plan with his colleagues and friends. He figured that if 1,000 dentists would contribute the net receipts of approximately \$1,000 from the

provision of a crown, an endo treatment, and an extraction each year for four years, the endowment would be fully funded by the year 2012. It is a goal that his many friends and close colleagues have committed to help achieve in his name. Anyone who wishes to join them and help to keep his dream and his legacy alive, can contact the USC Dental Development Office.

Charlie Goldstein really was a visionary. While many of his efforts had focused on providing care to children in underserved communities, the growing geriatric population also had caught his attention at an early time. According to longtime colleague, Roseann Mul-

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ligan, DDS, “As is typical of Charlie, he recognized long before anyone else did, a societal issue, in this case the aging of the population and their growing need for oral health care.” Her statement was recalling a conversation she had with Charlie in the fall of 1981.

“Charlie said that the curriculum did not provide training in geriatric dentistry that would prepare its dental and hygiene students to care for increasing numbers of elders. He said all of this long before the aging of our societies was recognized by the experts.” She noted that this led Charlie to ask her to join him in developing a geriatric dentistry program at the USC School of Dentistry.

According to Rosenblum, Charlie Goldstein “was a born caregiver.” An important reminder of his legendary contributions was the presentation by the California Dental Association Dental Foundation of its inaugural Humanitarian Award the day before he passed away. In making the presentation, Dr. Bruce Toy, chairman of the Foundation remarked, “He represented the best of professional dentistry through his selfless service, leadership, and commitment to helping improve the quality of life and oral health of thousands of children. His endless compassion will live on through the lives he has touched.”

A few years ago, he presented his thoughts on the meaning of “success.” He stated that his favorite words on the subject were penned by Ralph Waldo Emerson:

*“To laugh often and much;  
To win the respect of intelligent  
people and the affection of children;  
To earn the appreciation of honest critics  
and endure the betrayal of false friends;  
To appreciate beauty;  
To find the best in others;  
To leave the world a bit better,  
whether a healthy child, a garden patch,  
or a redeemed social condition;  
To know even one life has breathed  
easier because you have lived.”*

Charlie Goldstein was an outstanding human being and a rare professional. He was a fine dentist who possessed good organizational and practice management skills. He was creative and, above all, he was giving. When all of these attributes and skills are combined, you have an individual who was an exemplary humanitarian who should be remembered forever as a contemporary dental legend. ■■■■

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