

A Profile in Leadership

El Dr. Robert Slick Vanarsdall Jr. fue un maestro que supo crear “escuela” y discípulos. En éste y el próximo número de REO diferentes profesionales y discípulos le rinden un homenaje de agradecimiento sincero. La iniciativa de la REO cuenta con las colaboraciones de ortodontistas europeos y con la de autores de los EE. UU. coordinados desde allí por el Dr. Ignacio Blasi, al que queremos agradecer su magnífica labor en este homenaje.

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Robert L. Vanarsdall, known by many as “Slick,” was, above all else, a true gentleman and a great person. He was an outstanding professional, a pioneer, a creative, and an innovative contributor to the Specialty of Orthodontics. Slick led the Orthodontic Department at the University of Pennsylvania for more than 25 consecutive years. As a passionate and charismatic Chairman, Slick had a strong and charming personality. He welcomed many visitors and friends to the program. Whenever there was a knock on his office door, all visitors were warmly welcomed without hesitation and without being made to feel that they were interrupting him. No matter how important the project on which he was working, Slick always took the time to be available. Dr. Vanarsdall had a strong work ethic and he pushed his residents to become better by his example. Many of the residents remember that one of the things that Slick always emphasized was to put the patients’ interest first. True to his authenticity, this was exactly the way Slick practiced orthodontics. Dr. Vanarsdall loved teaching the residents. Many times after his lecturing trips, he went directly from the airport to the classroom. His dedication to the program was evident every day of his tenure as he worked tirelessly to help the program expand and the residents succeed. He set a high standard in his devotion to the department and its graduating residents considered him an icon of the Penn Alumni family.

Slick was always cheerful and had the unique ability to make friends wherever he went. You could not engage in conversation with him without feeling better for having exchanged ideas with him. Slick had a fantastic sense of humor; he had a story for every situation (usually involving an impacted canine) and a smile to go with every story. You could not help but smile a bit yourself when Slick was around. He had a serious side as well though; serious about his patients, serious about his teaching, and serious about his commitment to his family and friends. He always went out of his way to help a friend or colleague when asked to do so. I remember the many times I saw him on the phone lending his support and advice when needed. As he knew so many people, this sometimes must have seemed like a “full time job,” but Slick never looked at it that way. In fact, there is much anecdotal evidence for Slick’s commitment to encourage and support his friends and colleagues. At one point, when he was on a site visit at a school, Slick changed his travel plans at the last minute to include a trip to a friend’s office in Texas to assist in exposing a cuspid that was not cooperating that was the kind of person he was. Slick’s genuine compassion and caring spirit were present in everything he did and could be considered two hallmarks of his extraordinary life. There are many examples of his compassion and caring spirit; the most remarkable example was his unwavering commitment to a patient with a complex impacted canine for whom he stayed late in his office on the last day of practice, 2 weeks before, he succumbed to his cancer.

In our profession, Slick's extensive scientific and educational contribution has influenced many generations of orthodontists. Starting with the editing of Dr. Morton Amsterdam's classic monogram in the Alpha Omegan Journal: 25 years in retrospect¹, and followed by 17 years of coeditorship of the Quintessence Journal - The International Journal of Adult Orthodontics and Orthognathic Surgery², Slick essentially laid the groundwork for a "subspecialty" of adult orthodontics. He was one of the first orthodontists to be a dual Board Certified specialist in both periodontics and orthodontics. In fact, the relationship between orthodontics and periodontics took a significant shift after Slick stepped into the picture. He influenced the conceptual and clinical foundation for an integrated, multidisciplinary approach to periodontics, orthodontics, and restorative dentistry³. He published chapters in 12 textbooks, over 100 scientific articles and abstracts, and coauthored two books, Orthodontics: current principles and techniques⁴ and applications of orthodontics mini-implants⁵. While fighting his cancer, he finished coediting the 1000 page - 6th edition of the Graber, Vanarsdall, Vig, and Huang textbook⁶ - the most widely used orthodontic textbook in the world. In addition, he spoke for over 500 scientific presentations in many different countries, to many different audiences and inspired an incredible number of young dentists to become orthodontists and to embrace his treatment philosophy in their own practices. The net effect is that there are millions of patients worldwide whose lives have been improved by Slick's influence on dentistry and orthodontics. We must acknowledge that a significant measure of our professional knowledge in this area is due to his accomplishments in and devotion to our specialty. It is for these reasons and so many more to numerous for this commentary that we respectfully want to dedicate this editorial to Dr. Robert Vanarsdall - "Slick" well deserves our consideration.

Slick symbolized hard work, dedication, commitment to his family, friends, residents, and patients. He was a good friend and a good person. Thank you, Slick for helping us all in the time we shared together with you here. You have left a lasting legacy that will endure ages. The profession has lost a great talent and we have lost a great friend.

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