



Dominick P. DePaola



Dr. Dominick DePaola, affectionately known as “Dom” by his colleagues and friends, died suddenly on April 16, 2013, at the age of 70. Dom, the son of Marie and Dominick DePaola, was born on December 29, 1942, in his cherished Brooklyn, NY. After an academic career spanning over 40 years as Professor, Dean of three dental schools, CEO/President of the Forsyth Institute, and President of two international professional societies, he retired in 2008. However, after “retirement,” he couldn’t resist and became an associate dean at a dental college near his new home in Florida. As he said in 2009, he had “flunked retirement but was having fun.” Indeed, throughout Dom’s career, he always seemed to have fun.

Education. Dom received his bachelor’s degree in 1964 from St. Francis College in Brooklyn. As a side note, just prior to his death, he was about

to receive an alumni achievement award and an honorary degree from his alma mater. It didn’t work out, but he started his career in medical school in Bologna, Italy. However in 1969, he earned his D.D.S. from New York University College of Dentistry. Afterwards, he interned at Beth Abraham Hospital where he realized that pursuing a career in research and education was his best bet— indeed, it was a great bet, and in 1974, he received his Ph.D. in Nutritional Biochemistry and Metabolism at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge. Using a rabbit animal model, his research focused on the role of nutrition in early development of the oral cavity.

Leadership in academia. Dom began his move into academia in 1974 as Assistant/Associate Professor at the VCU Medical College of Virginia. In 1978, he initially became a tenured Professor of Pharmacology at Fairleigh Dickinson University, but began his leadership roles just a year later as Assistant Dean for Postgraduate Affairs and Research. In 1981, he moved on to the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio and, soon after in 1983, he became Dean of the School of Dentistry which he served until 1987. In his last year at San Antonio, he was also Interim Dean of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. In 1988, he became Dean of the New Jersey College of Medicine & Dentistry. Baylor College of Dentistry in Texas lured him away in 1990 where he served as President and Dean for seven years. It was during his tenure that the Baylor College of Dentistry joined Texas A&M University. During his time

*In tribute to their dedicated efforts to science and medicine, deceased members of the Harvard Faculty of Medicine (those at the rank of full or emeritus professor) receive a review of their life and contributions with a complete reflection, a **Memorial Minute**.*

in Texas, he spent a considerable amount of time in Mexico building international programs. Dom felt that “collaboration stimulates us to seek some common ground.” He had academic appointments at Tufts University School of Dental Medicine and at Harvard School of Dental Medicine.

The Forsyth Institute era. From 1998 to 2007, Dom was the CEO/President of The Forsyth Institute, an affiliate of the Harvard School of Dental Medicine, Harvard Medical School. This era turned out to be the longest stop in his illustrious career. The authors of these in memoriam minutes know Dom well from this period. He was acknowledged as a fair-minded administrator, but his background as a researcher gave him a great appreciation for science and how it was conducted. Consequently, the approximately 30 Principal Investigators had essentially free reign in their scientific endeavors that enabled The Forsyth Institute to continue to flourish and maintain its long-standing and distinguished leadership position in oral health research. He was instrumental in changing the name from “The Forsyth Dental Center” to the name “The Forsyth Institute” in order to emphasize, to those outside the oral research arena, the more accurate perception of Forsyth’s mission—to ameliorate or prevent oral and craniofacial diseases and their systemic impact, and improve overall health, through research and technological innovation for the benefit of people everywhere.

As President/CEO of Forsyth, he interacted regularly with corporate sponsors, health advocacy groups, and Massachusetts legislators and city officials to help promote the profile of Forsyth and its mission to reflect its commitment to science and discovery. Through these efforts, Dom helped to enhance Forsyth’s preeminent standing in the field of oral and systemic health research.

While at the same time promoting the advancement of cutting-edge science, he reconnected Forsyth to its roots with the establishment of The Forsyth Kids Program that, to this day, continues to provide oral health care to those in need throughout the greater Boston area. He was a compassionate leader, a team builder, with a sole motivation to make Forsyth the best it could be. He held his staff in high regard and many called him friend.

In addition to his leadership, Dom strove to make Forsyth a fun place to work, often with his flare and great sense of humor. He promoted the annual Forsyth Halloween parties. Although Dom always would have fared well by having the best costume(s), e.g., a mobster bowler, he was more usually one of the judges and had to recuse himself from the competition. The Forsyth Holiday parties became Gala events, the table tennis tournaments were competitive and exciting, and he made all staff feel appreciated by rewarding individual’s achievements, from scientific accomplishments to their years of service.

With the background music of “Theme from New York, New York” by Frank Sinatra, there is a wonderful YouTube tribute to Dom that sums up his years at Forsyth, (www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmLoOUzl7kg).

Professional activities. His leadership qualities in academia gave him national and international recognition. For example in 1990, he served as President of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA), previously known as the American Association of Dental Schools. He co-founded the Santa Fe Group, a think tank dedicated to improving oral health. He was a Senior Consultant for the Academy for Academic Leadership, which is a collaborative of scholars, educational specialists, and consultants who provide services that help academic leaders pursue educational excellence. He served on the Commission on Dental Accreditation, and was a member of the boards of the Block Drug Company,

Research!America and the Friends of NIDCR. He was also the Chairman of the Board of Oral Health America, a member of the AADR Board of Directors (2002 to 2006) and, most notably, was the 33rd President of the AADR in 2004 to 2005. During this time, he was active in focusing on dental education and communication among the various dental research associations. It is noteworthy that Dom was the first person elected by his peers to serve as president of both ADEA and the AADR.

Dom often served as an expert witness or consultant for the National Institutes of Health, the American Dental Association, the Federal Trade Commission, The Food and Drug Administration, numerous universities, and companies. He was a sought-after lecturer, presenting over 800 national and international guest lectures throughout his career.

Honors. Stemming from Dom's enthusiastic and successful leadership roles in academia, he received many awards and honors including: 3 honorary degrees, the ADEA/Gies Foundation Award for Outstanding Achievement as a Dental educator, the Callahan Medallion Award, the David B. Kriser Medal, the ADEA Distinguished Service Award, and Distinguished Alumnus Awards from St. Francis College and New York University. In 2001, he was awarded an Honorary Membership to the American Dietetic Association (ADA), the only dentist ever to receive this honor.

Retirement. For his retirement in 2008, he and his wife Rosemary moved to Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. He tried to keep busy but soon concluded that you can only play so much golf. Consequently, as already noted, he became an Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at Nova Southeastern University, College of Dental Medicine in Fort Lauderdale. He was very active as a consultant for the Academy for Academic Leadership, and became involved again with the Santa Fe Group as its president. One of his last activities was working on a major conference to help determine the future directions of dental hygiene as a profession. Dental education was indeed his passion until the end. He felt that dental students have to become critical thinkers, lifelong learners, and problem solvers who care about the health of the public.

Legacy. Dom meant so much to many. The remembrance quotes responding to his obituary all had a common thread—Dom was a leader, a role model, yet still a humorous, regular guy. His personal and professional life can be best summed up from the following remembrance quotes of friends, family, and colleagues (www.legacy.com).

“Dom was truly a visionary leader in the field of oral health education, and his impact on young aspiring dentists and the industry has been profound. ... has immeasurably changed the field of oral health care in this country.”

“Dom had an extraordinary ability to build deep and lasting friendships and relationships with family, friends, colleagues, students and associates. “

“You could just tell that Dom was a good man--who loved his family...and loved life.”
“...his accolades in the field of dentistry were phenomenal; though you'd never know it because he was so humble.”

“He was not afraid to tell you how he felt ... and offered a kindness that was infectious... Dom leaves one of the great legacies in dentistry and oral health care generally. His vision, insights and energy will continue to inspire those of us who knew him...Dom was a mentor,

colleague and friend; he was one of the first and foremost visionaries and leaders in the world of nutrition and dentistry; his insight and guidance to many will be long remembered.”

“Dom was an icon in health professions education and research. His passing cannot diminish the light of leadership that he brought to our professions. It is now our responsibility to carry on his legacy. He was a key mentor to me throughout my career as he was to so many others.”

“Dom was an extraordinary and gifted human being. A brilliant man, and also just a regular guy, with a kind and generous heart and a great sense of humor. He was a friend and mentor...”

“Dom was a great teacher, caregiver, and leader, but he was, more important, a kind, humble, genuine person of absolute integrity and easy, great humor.”

His longtime friend and colleague, Michael Alfano, perhaps said it best.

“Along the way, he somehow managed to have the most amazing career, nurture a wonderful family, and deeply touch the hearts of the thousands of students, scientists, business people and administrators who came to know and love him throughout the world. Dom was laser sharp, wonderfully funny, creative, impatient, and amazingly energetic. In fact, with Dom, you would never take his pulse to see how he was doing, you would count the number of pumps of his right knee while he was sitting burning all of his excess nervous energy.

Dom was a natural leader, and he rose to lead several significant organizations. From time to time, if he thought I was going soft on some issue, he would quote me a line from The Godfather – ‘It is better to be feared than to be loved.’But, his followers never feared him; they respected him AND they loved him.”

Dom is survived by Rosemary, his wife of 43 years, his daughter Alexis and her husband Gaetano Chiparo, his extended family, his many longstanding friends, and his beloved Brooklyn.

Respectfully submitted,

Bruce J. Paster, Ph.D., *Chairperson*
Henry C. Margolis, Ph.D.
Philip Stashenko, D.M.D., Ph.D
Thomas E. Van Dyke, D.D.S., Ph.D.