

“Science was his life”

**Dr. Peter Geistlich – scientist, entrepreneur
and unique personality (1927 – 2014)**



If I were asked to summarise Dr. Peter Geistlich’s achievements as an entrepreneur in a single sentence I would say this: He led Geistlich into a new era, created new standards in patient care and forged important milestones in regenerative medicine. But, for anyone who experienced his unique personality close up and witnessed what he achieved, that does not really do him justice.

Almost exactly 60 years ago, after he had been awarded his doctorate as a chemical engineer at the Federal Polytechnic School ETH, Peter Geistlich joined our Swiss family enterprise in 1954 and shortly afterwards he was appointed to the Board of Directors. In the years after the war, our company produced glue, fertilisers and gelatine on an industrial scale, the emphasis being on technical progress and growth.

Peter Geistlich joined the Pharmaceutical Division in Wolhusen, which made antibiotic preparations and calcium products as well as manufacturing third party products under licence. Quickly, and with great creativity, he began to search for new in-house products, and, for example, as early as 1959 he took out a patent for an agent against tuberculosis. During the 1970s, he introduced medical body care products and cosmetics. Then in 1974, he took over from his father Paul Geistlich as chairman of the board of directors.

Over the past 60 years, the company has seen many successes, but there have also been the occasional setbacks, such as having to sell the cosmetic line Mediline and the fertiliser business, and the discontinuation of gelatine production. But Peter Geistlich had great vision and was never discouraged because he regarded both success and failure as being two sides of the same coin. He kept a keen weather eye on the future and repeatedly strove to break new ground with undaunted enthusiasm. In doing so, he was able to count at all times on the great support of his wife, Anne-Marie, and the rest of his family.

In the 1980s, by changing strategic direction into medical technology, Peter Geistlich quietly managed the transformation of our business from an industrial manufacturer to a modern technology company. This change was based on the solid foundation of Peter's



profound knowledge of bones and collagen as well as his scientific collaborations with his friends Professor Myron Spector of Harvard University and Professor Philip J. Boyne of Loma Linda University in the USA. Two enduring legacies resulting from both these friendships were the *Philip J. Boyne and Peter*

Geistlich Professorship in Loma Linda University and the *Osteo Science Foundation* established in 2013.

From a historical perspective, in the 1980s, Philip Boyne was originally seeking bone replacement material for oral and maxillofacial surgery. Peter Geistlich's idea was to create new, high-tech products from the bones and collagen which were being processed industrially by GPAG in Wolhusen. In fact, it soon transpired that the newly developed products Geistlich Bio-Oss® and Geistlich Bio-Gide® could be used successfully in combination to build up the maxillary bone. Previously untreatable patients with thin maxillary bone could now have their bone augmented and consequently have implants placed. Dental surgeons were now easily able to achieve far more aesthetically pleasing results with these new products from Geistlich. This was a paradigm shift that wholly revolutionised implant technology and regenerative medicine. As a direct result of this pioneering work Geistlich Pharma AG has now become the global market leader in regenerative dental medicine, with these safe and effective products being used in patients over 1 million times a year.

This widespread public recognition of this pioneering work resulted in Geistlich Pharma twice winning the Prize for Innovation of Central Switzerland. This provided Peter Geistlich with great, but typically modest satisfaction. Shortly before his death, Peter Geistlich was presented with the Distinguished Humanitarian Award by Loma Linda University for his relentless efforts in the interests of patients. He regarded this as an exceptional honour.

Over the years, Peter Geistlich extended the concept of biological regeneration to new areas such as soft tissue regeneration and the treatment of cartilage damage in orthopaedics. A lifelong interest of his was in active pharmaceutical substances, foremost among them Taurolin, a substance with bactericidal effects which – as was discovered later – also showed interesting effects on tumour cells, having potential in the fight against cancer. Peter Geistlich was firmly convinced in the beneficial effects of Taurolin and throughout his life and endeavoured to make a breakthrough with it.

Science was his life. The over 140 patents granted to Peter Geistlich bear witness to his talent for research. In 2003, Peter Geistlich and his company founded the *Osteology Foundation* for the purpose of researching new possibilities of regeneration in the field of dentistry. Exchanging experiences with dedicated scientists was always very important to him. However, he was not personally interested in being the focus of public attention, because his true focus was always on the pursuit of evidence based science and the ultimate benefits that this modest and restrained approach could bring to mankind.

Peter Geistlich was an excellent role model for all our scientists, because continued, even into his last days, to have new ideas. He was keen to listen to other people's ideas and believed that they should be carefully pursued without fear of the consequences. From his point of view every product should be scientifically proven to be both safe and effective for the patient, and also easy to use by the clinician, failing which he inevitably imposed his veto. This dedication to evidence based science has now become the global trademark of our company, and, as a direct consequence, Geistlich enjoys today an excellent worldwide reputation in the field of science and regenerative medicine. Clearly, the spirit of Peter Geistlich continues to pervade the company.

Peter Geistlich was a man with great charisma and a sense of humour. He had a benevolent and a tenacious side, allowing his staff great freedom of action but never quite letting go of the reins. He was also a social entrepreneur who always promoted the wellbeing of his employees. At an early date, he advocated a staff welfare scheme to ensure a stable future for his employees and he was always willing to help when the need arose. His humanity and commitment remain unforgotten. To this day, employees

and partners as well as scientists in Switzerland and abroad continue to appreciate and admire the family character and the integrity of the company. These things will live on, even now that Peter Geistlich is no longer with us.



He happily invested a great deal of his energy and resources in research and was keenly interested in the results until the end of his life. His beloved park in Wolhusen, where he planted a sequoia last November will help keep alive our memories of this unique man.

Dr Andreas Geistlich
President of the Board
Ed. Geistlich Söhne AG

12 August 2014