

Pierre Fauchard

the father of modern Dentistry (1678 - 1761)

Pierre Fauchard (1678 -1761) started his working life at the age of 15 as a cadet in the French Navy. There he was greatly influenced by a Navy Surgeon, Alexander Potelert, who lit the interest in the healing arts which was to direct the career of the young Pierre. Pursuing that commitment, Fauchard left the navy after three years at sea, during which time he had observed many oral diseases, especially scurvy, amongst his colleagues.

Pierre simply began working as a dentist.. there were no formal training courses and no formal regulatory bodies at that time. At the University of Angers, he undertook revolutionary medical and dental work and pioneered the sciences of Oral and Maxillo-facial surgery. He used the title "Chirurgien Dentiste" (surgical dentist), developed several instruments, often based on jewellery, watchmaking and even barbers' tools. He pursued a philosophy of endeavouring to save teeth rather than simply extracting the offending item.

Uncharacteristically for the time, Fauchard was eager to share his knowledge, skills and techniques and between 1716 and 1718, he spent much time travelling, studying and teaching. Pierre settled in Paris in 1718 ...a city which saw him refine his techniques, extend his acumen... and commence work towards his seminal contribution to dental literature. There were then scant books on Dentistry and Pierre decided to produce an encyclopaedic volume on oral surgery.

Considerable devotion to that endeavour included many interviews with colleagues and he drew heavily on personal diaries he had kept over the years. By the time "Le Chirurgien Dentiste" was finally published in 1728 it was in two volumes carrying together 783 pages. A German translation was ready in 1733, a revised and enlarged edition in French appeared in 1746 ...the English version was eventually completed in 1946... two hundred years later!

The book introduced many new and innovative concepts ...indeed he designed a first dental drill... powered manually using catgut wrapped around a cylinder.



Page 203 and 204 of *Le Chirurgien Dentiste* by Dr Pierre Fauchard.



Fauchard identified sugar as a major hazard to dental health ...and disproved the German theory of a "tooth worm". Intriguingly he recommended braces to correct poorly positioned teeth and suggested amalgams for tooth restorations. No less intriguing is his recommendation for a daily gargle with urine!

The practice of the Surgeon Dentist in Paris was highly successful for Pierre Fauchard was a dentist of unsurpassed skill and knowledge. He attracted the rich and the famous! Quite apart from the technological advances Dr Fauchard introduced, he also had considerable influence on the ethics of the profession and on clinical etiquette. He suggested the dentist should stand behind the nervous patient! Implacable foe of charlatans, he denounced medical malpractice.

Dr Fauchard married Elisabeth Chemin in 1729 and five years later the couple purchased a small chateau ...Grandmesnil, at Bur sur Yvette to the south of Paris.

Today a bust of the famous dentist stands in the grounds of the chateau. Pierre passed away in 1761 and was buried in Paris.



Indubitably the "father of modern Dentistry".

References

1. Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Fauchard.
2. British Dental Journal. <https://www.nature.com/articles/4814350>.