

# D. Walter Cohen, Dental Medicine

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Walter Cohen

D. Walter Cohen, dean emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania School of Dental Medicine, died June 29 at the age of 91.

Born in Philadelphia, Dr. Cohen earned his undergraduate degree at Penn and his DDS from Penn's School of Dental Medicine in 1950.

After a research fellowship in pathology and periodontics at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston, he returned to Penn in 1951 as an assistant instructor. He became an assistant professor and then a full professor in 1963, the same year that he established the school's department of periodontics and became its first chairman. In 1966, he was elected president of the American Society of Periodontists. By the time he was named dean in 1972, he had been associate dean for two years and he was already a nationally known investigator in periodontal disease (*Almanac* December 21, 1971 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v18pdf/n16/122171.pdf>)). He served as dean until 1983.

In 1972, the School of Dental Medicine launched a new program to prepare those with PhDs in biological, physical and engineering sciences for careers as dentists; it culminated in the DMD degree. It was the first such program in the country to be financed by federal funds (*Almanac* September 19, 1972 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v19pdf/n04/091972.pdf>)).

When Dr. Cohen outlined progress and plans for the School (*Almanac* July 1973 (<https://almanac.upenn.edu/archive/v20pdf/n01/071973.pdf>)) as it related to the future of the University, he described many interdisciplinary interactions and affiliations across the campus including engineering, education, anthropology, medicine, veterinary medicine as well as the MBA program at Wharton. He was honored with membership in the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies of Science in 1980. For many years he also had a dental practice in Center City.

"Dean Cohen not only shaped the future of Penn's School of Dental Medicine, but he shaped the dentistry practice worldwide . . . he related periodontal disease to restorative dentistry, worked to enhance the outcomes of patient oral health and changed the face of dental education. He served humanity worldwide with service to universities and patients throughout the world, including close relationships with schools in Israel and Europe," said Mark S. Wolff, the new Morton Amsterdam Dean of the School of Dental Medicine. "Individuals affecting generational changes touch us so rarely, but the Penn Dental community has the privilege of having been touched by Walter," Dr. Wolff added.

He helped create the Executive Leadership Program for Women in Academic Medicine and Dentistry (ELAM). Over a 16-year period, more than 700 women graduated from the program, many advancing to leadership roles in dental schools around the country.

He spearheaded the Penn Experiment, which is detailed in his 1985 book, *Educating the Dentists of the Future: The Pennsylvania Experiment*.

Dean Cohen's father, Abram Cohen, D'23, established the Joseph L. T. Appleton Award in 1979. It is presented annually to a part-time faculty member for excellence in clinical teaching and is named in honor of Dr. Appleton, D'14, who served as dean of the School 1941-1951.

Dean Cohen became president of the Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1986, and chancellor in 1993. He was later named chancellor emeritus of the Drexel University College of Medicine, and a former president and chancellor of the Medical College of Pennsylvania.

In 1997, Dr. Cohen established the D. Walter Cohen Middle East Center for Dental Education at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, which offered an exchange program between dental students at Hebrew University and Palestinian students at the Al-Quds School of Dentistry in Jerusalem, the *Dental Tribune* reported in 2010.

Dr. Cohen received the French government's Legion of Merit, was chair of the Pennsylvania Diabetes Academy and president of the National Museum of American Jewish History. He received eight honorary doctorates from universities around the world including the University of Bucharest in Romania and the University of Athens in Greece.

Dr. Cohen was chosen as the recipient of the 2005 Paul Goldhaber Award, given by the Harvard School of Dental Medicine. The award—given to dental scientists and educators—is in honor of Harvard's former dental school dean. Dr. Cohen was honored for his outstanding national and international contribution to dental education and the dental profession.

In 2011, he received the Isador Hirschfeld Award from the Northeastern Society of Periodontists in New York for his contributions to the advancement of periodontology. In addition, the American Academy of Periodontology established the D. Walter Cohen Teaching Award for periodontal postgraduate students entering careers in education.

In celebration of the 35th anniversary of its founding, the National Disease Research Interchange established the D. Walter Cohen, DDS Service to Science Award in 2015; he was the inaugural recipient. In subsequent years, the Award has been presented to an individual whose career exemplifies a commitment of service to science.

He served on the boards of the Drexel University College of Medicine, Philadelphia University, Gratz College, the National Disease Research Interchange, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Philly Pops and the Hadassah Medical Organization.

Dr. Cohen's wife, Betty Ann Axelrod Cohen, preceded him in death. He is survived by three daughters, Jane E. Millner, Amy Cohen and Dr. Joanne Cohen Katz; five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

The Penn School of Dental Medicine is planning a celebration of Dr. Cohen's life in the fall; details will be announced when they are available.