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the editor's corner

The Greeks had a word for it and it was "holism". It seems fairly clear that it has remained Greek to most people since that time. Every now and again, holism is revived, creates great excitement in a variety of endeavors and fades away, only to show up again as a new generation rediscovers it. Jan C. Smuts is sometimes given credit for the formulation of modern holistic theory. He said that the determining factors in Nature are wholes, which are irreducible to the sum of their parts. Alternate holistic doctrine has said that a whole cannot be analyzed without reduction to its individual parts. In a similar manner, Gestalt psychology stated that perceptions and behavior were responses to configurational wholes, while its counterpart — atomistic psychology — held that perceptions were built from simple elements or atomistic parts. Atomistic theory predates Socrates and perhaps holism was a philosophical response to it.

Chances are pretty fair that holism is violated whenever it is applied to a circumscribed activity. Holism, after all, is a way of life, or a way of understanding life. It has been argued that the English state was not a summation of the individuals who were members of it, but an organic structure with a life of its own, a holistic life of its own. Perhaps so, but even the lordly English state was found holistically wanting and the concept expired with the nineteenth century. As we speak today of holistic health, holistic dentistry, and holistic orthodontics, we are contributing to the next demise of holism by breaking it down to its parts.

The simple fact is that people, espe-

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cially scientifically trained people, are better at deductive reasoning than inductive reasoning. It would be unfortunate if, because of that, or because holism and alternate holism are not scientifically provable, we were to reject both of them out of hand.

While we may identify a majority of orthodontic problems as having a genetic origin and believe that they are a product of aberrations of growth and development of teeth, jaws, possibly muscles, we also recognize the influence of airway and we are on the verge of implicating stress and its relation to functional stress.

By the very nature of the influence that patient cooperation and patient motivation have on the success of orthodontic treatment, orthodontics is especially well-suited to that aspect of holistic health that would involve the patient in his diagnosis and in his treatment, and in his responsibility for his own treatment. Also, the contribution that orthodontics can make to the individual's appearance, comfort, sense of well-being and body wholeness, self esteem, success and happiness are all rooted in concepts of holistic health.

The vast majority of orthodontists probably have a problem in accepting or even considering the concept of positive imaging, which entertains the possibility that tooth movement might be accomplished through mental imaging mobilizing some kind of force directed at a tooth or teeth. So far, there is no reason that they should not be skeptical. Being skeptical, they need neither accept nor reject the idea; merely suspend judgment. Which brings us full circle to the scientific habit of thought.

It would be as harmful to reject science and the scientific method as it would be to reject holistic concepts of health. There may well be an accommo-

dation of the two in the practice of orthodontics.

Orthodontists have an opportunity to make a positive change in their philosophy and that of their patients, in their expectations from orthodontic treatment and in their patients' expectations. That change would involve a concept of orthodontics that is different from the traditional one of straightening teeth as "the job". Orthodontists and patients together may view straightening of teeth as a biomechanical procedure, which along with physiological and psychological goals evolves a higher state of health and well-being.

The question for the moment is, apart from understanding what holism may be, whether it is essential to "buy" the whole concept in one piece. Is holistic health an all or nothing concept? A behaviorist might feel that way. It would be reasonable for a scientist to take what he can understand and find good, and let the rest evolve if it will. □