The Life of Konstantin Pavlovich Buteyko

Taken from the book **Close Your Mouth** by Patrick McKeown

Konstantin Pavlovich Buteyko was born near Kiev in the Ukraine on January 27th, 1923. This simple yet extraordinary man devoted his life to studying the human organism and made one of the most profound discoveries in the history of medicine.

Buteyko commenced his medical training in Russia in 1946 at the First Medical Institute of Moscow. Part of one of his practical assignments involved monitoring the breathing of terminally ill patients prior to death. After hundreds of hours spent observing and recording breathing patterns, he was able to predict with accuracy, often to the minute, the time of death of each patient. Each patient's breathing increased as their condition deteriorated and as they approached death.

While at University Buteyko was diagnosed as suffering from malignant hypertension, a fatal form of blood pressure which gave him life expectancy of just 12 months. Under the guidance of his tutors Buteyko researched his illness in depth although it seemed that there was very little that he could do to reverse it.

On October 7th,1952 after majoring in clinical therapy, he began to wonder whether the cause of his condition, which was going from bad to worse, might be his deep breathing. He checked this by reducing his breathing. Within minutes his headache,

the pain in his right kidney and his heartache ceased. To confirm his discovery, he took five deep breaths and the pain returned. He again reversed his deep breathing and the pain disappeared.

He did not appreciate it at the time, but this was one of the greatest, although as yet largely unacknowledged, medical discoveries of the twentieth century. Buteyko established that breathing, so vital in sustaining life, can be not alone the cure but also, amazingly, the cause of so many of diseases of civilisation.

Buteyko measured the breathing patterns of patients suffering from asthma, but he also included in his research sufferers from other ailments and found in many cases that they too hyperventilated between attacks. After many years research, he went on to work on the theoretical aspects of his discovery at the Central and Lenin Medical Libraries. He devised a programme to measure breathing and also a method of reconditioning patients' breathing to normal levels. This involved:

1. Switching from mouth breathing to nasal breathing.
2. Relaxation of the diaphragm until an air shortage is felt.
3. Small lifestyle changes are necessary to assist with this, thus commencing the road to full recovery.

Buteyko received a cold reception from the medical establishment at the time. In order to have his discovery accepted he commenced clinical research on a mixed group of two hundred people some sick and some healthy, in 1959. On January 11th, 1960 he demonstrated to the Scientific Forum at the Institute the correlation between depth of breathing, carbon dioxide levels in the body and state of health.

However, for many of his colleagues Dr. Buteyko offered too great a challenge to many of the theories upon which medicine was based. Surely illness, for which the conventional medical remedy was surgery and/or extensive medication, could not be dealt with simply by a change in breathing. Yet this was exactly what Buteyko demonstrated. And while not receiving outright acceptance, Buteyko did gain the temporary support of Professor Meshalkin, the chairman of the Forum, in enabling the research to continue.

In the years that followed, Buteyko continued his research, assisted by a team of two hundred qualified medical personnel and using the most up to date technology. By 1967 over one thousand patients with asthma, and other illnesses, had recovered from their conditions using his methods.

In April 1980, following trials in Leningrad and at the First Moscow Institute of Pediatric Diseases, the Buteyko Breathing Method was officially acknowledged as having a one hundred per cent success rate. This research was directed by the Soviet Ministry's Committee for Science and Technology.

The USSR Committee on Inventions and Discoveries formally acknowledged Buteyko's discovery in 1983 and issued the patent entitled "The method of treatment of hypocapnia", (Authors certificate No. 1067640 issued on September 15th, 1983). Interestingly, the date of the discovery as listed in the document was backdated to January 29th, 1962. His discovery was officially recognised twenty years after it had been made.

Over two hundred medical professionals teach this therapy at present from centres located in major towns throughout Russia. Buteyko wrote over fifty scientific publications detailing the relationship between respiration and carbon dioxide and at

least five Ph.D. dissertations were written by his colleagues. The basis of the Buteyko Breathing Method detailing the relationship between carbon dioxide and breath holding-time forms part of medical curriculum at Universities.

I was very fortunate to meet and speak with Professor Buteyko during March 2002 at the Buteyko Clinic in Moscow. At the time of meeting, his health was failing due to a very serious car accident in which he had been involved ten years previously. Although he visited the clinic regularly, he had retired at that time and instead devoted his mind to matters of a more spiritual nature.

On Friday, May 2nd 2003 at 4.05 p.m. (Moscow time), Professor Buteyko parted from this world with some very deep inspirations. His death came as quite a shock to the many people around the world who had experienced excellent health as a result of his life's work. His wish was to be buried in the country of his birth, the Ukraine. His resting place is in Feodosia in the Crimea, Ukraine.

His memory will live on and I feel will grow in momentum as more and more people hear about his discovery.

In 1990 the Buteyko Breathing Method was brought outside Russia to Australia by Sasha Stalmatski. In 1995 Stalmatski brought this method to the UK and, for a number of years, it has been practised at the famous Hale Clinic (opened in 1988 by Prince Charles).

Buteyko's Method challenges the belief that overbreathing is beneficial and also uncovers many causes of illness unexplained by modern medicine. It seems extraordinary that modern medicine, with all its research and resources, human, technical and scientific, has continually failed to verify the link between overbreathing and various medical conditions, notably asthma.

The efforts which Buteyko had to make to have his discovery recognised also seem to indicate an unwillingness on the part of the medical community to accept discoveries not pharmaceutically based in part perhaps because they challenge long standing and sincerely held beliefs.

My own belief is that Buteyko will in time gain full acceptance from the medical community, although it may take some years. The quicker this can be accomplished, the greater the contribution that Buteyko's discovery will make to the health of mankind.