Dentist Dr Val Kolpakov has an unusual hobby: He collects toothpaste. His collection is currently recognised as the largest in the world by the World Records Academy. Born in Russia, Dr Kolpakov moved to the US in 1993 to work as a researcher at the University of Michigan. For the past nine years he has been in practice at his own dental offices in Saginaw (Michigan) and Alpharetta (Georgia). Dr Kolpakov spoke to Yvonne Bachmann, DTI, about his collecting passion, radioactive collectibles and seaweed in our toothpaste.

Yvonne Bachmann: When did you get the idea to start collecting toothpaste?
Dr Val Kolpakov: It was 2002 and I was browsing the Internet. This was when I found some information on Carsten Gutzeit, a man from Germany who collected toothpaste. His collection stood at roughly 500 tubes. This was when I realised what a wonderful hobby collecting toothpaste would be for a dental professional. Imagine the opportunities it offers to learn about other variations of your profession. With this in mind, I decided to start my own collection of toothpaste.

I estimate that I have 2,000 samples.”

Dr Kolpakov has collected 2,000 samples of toothpaste. (DTI/Photo Dr. Kolpakov)

The most difficult part of collecting toothpaste is keeping track of all the samples I get. I estimate that I have 2,000 samples. However, I cannot tell you the exact number at this time. I have more than 1,700 tubes counted and entered into my database, but there are several big boxes with more samples waiting for their turn.

The most unusual collectible is Doradomad toothpaste dug out of World War II trenches that has an active radioactive compound. At that time, some people believed that radiation could revive dead tissues and that radioactive toothpaste could revive gums.

The main ingredients of all toothpastes are basically the same. However, there are local differences in flavour and some ingredients. Oriental toothpastes often contain ingredients like bamboo salt or gingernut. Japan is well-known for its “high-tech” toothpastes that rebuild enamel, re-mineralise teeth and halt the development of caries.

Are toothpastes generally the same? Is toothpaste bought in Japan any different from toothpaste bought in Italy?

My most unusual collectible is Doradomad toothpaste dug out of World War II trenches that has an active radioactive compound. At that time, some people believed that radiation could revive dead tissues and that radioactive toothpaste could revive gums.

I keep in touch with Carsten Gutzeit from Germany, whose collection inspired me. We have exchanged some toothpaste tubes. Since I started my collection, I have been contacted by several people who have small collections of toothpaste. Some of them have donated their entire collections to me. There is also a good collection of toothpowder tins at my alma mater, the University of Michigan dental school. They also have a very good collection of various vintage dental items.

My favourite kinds of toothpaste are alcohol flavoured. These range from whiskey, like scotch, rye, bourbon, to red wine, amaretto, champagne and many more. Another passion of mine is chocolate-flavoured toothpaste. I have a set of pure chocolate cream packaged in a toothpaste tube with a toothbrush for chocolate lovers. This is more of a gag-gift, considering that it is not intended for brushing teeth regularly. However, there are several real tubes of toothpaste with chocolate flavouring as well. Speaking of unusual flavours, the Breath Palette Company tops them all. They came up with 51 flavours, including some of the oldest kinds such as Green Tea, Pumpkin Pudding, and Indian Curry.

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What do you estimate the value of your collection to be? I have spent close to US$ 20,000 on all my samples. Consider the amount of work and time I have spent on my collection over the last nine years, I would estimate it at US$ 50,000. But at this time, I have no intention of selling it. It is my hobby, my passion, the way for me to attract people’s attention to my dental practice and spread information about this wonderful topic.

The evidence must include pictures, a detailed list of all my toothpaste, publications, and statements from witnesses, I do not actually hold this record yet, as was mistakenly reported in the media, but I hope to in the near future.

Thank you very much for this interview.