The Hanovia Kromayer Lamp
A Photo-Therapy Device

What was the Hanovia Kromayer Lamp?

The Hanovia Kromayer lamp was a special lamp used to treat patients with particular skin conditions by photo-therapy.

Photo-therapy is the treatment of diseases using focused light. It was a popular method of curing different conditions around 1900. The “Finsen Lamp” was one of the earliest and most famous devices used.

Ernst Kromayer used Finsen Lamps in his treatments, but he also made modifications of his own. In the early 1900s Kromayer found that he got better results by using a “mercury lamp” rather than the “arc lamp” used by Finsen. He also embedded the lamp in a cooling bath to allow higher intensities of light to be used.

One of the most well-known diseases treated by photo-therapy was lupus vulgaris (also known as tuberculosis of the skin). This illness left the patient severely disfigured, and was notorious for leaving scars on the skin even after treatment. Kromayer claimed that his lamp offered an improvement in treating lupus vulgaris and other conditions.
Who were Kromayer and Hanovia?

Ernst Kromayer was a German doctor who achieved international recognition for his work in dermatology, treating skin conditions and diseases. He lived from 1862-1933 and was based for most of his career in Berlin, Germany. He became even more famous for his important improvements to light therapy equipment for treating skin problems.

The Hanovia Chemical and Manufacturing Company was founded in 1905 in Newark, New Jersey. They made and sold disinfectants, and became involved in manufacturing and marketing Kromayer’s new devices.

Ernst Kromayer

Kromayer was not the first person to develop a treatment using UV light. He developed earlier devices made by the noted Danish physician Niels Finsen. The “Finsen Lamp” had made this form of light treatment popular, and Kromayer improved Finsen’s original design.
Why were Patents Important?

Ernst Kromayer applied for a patent for his lamp on 15 July 1905, and this was granted on 23 October 1906. Kromayer was a practising physician, so he was not in a position to organise the mass-production of his invention. He instead arranged for the Hanovia Company, which had just been set up, to manufacture and market his “Kromayer Lamp”.

The Hanovia Company marketed the Kromayer Lamp almost exclusively to the medical profession. It was an expensive device designed for use in hospitals. Hanovia also collaborated with other doctors and innovators to improve the lamp, and they introduced other similar devices.

Hanovia also defended their ownership of the device fiercely in the courtroom. The company brought legal action against rivals who tried to sell similar devices, although they were not always successful.

Kromayer’s name also became permanently attached to the device. Even 15 years after his death, the Hanovia Company was advertising the “new, self-contained Kromayer Lamp for focal treatment” in the British Medical Journal. Hanovia therefore used Kromayer’s name, much like their patents, as a strategy for creating a distinctive identity and a monopoly of the production of phototherapy devices.

Patents on the Kromayer Lamp

The Hanovia Company used patents as a deterrent to other manufacturers. They emblazoned the Kromayer Lamp with the patents which they had been awarded.