In September, Align Technology invited active Invisalign providers in the general dental practitioner (GDP) group, who offer the clear aligner system alongside some traditional orthodontic treatment options, to its GDP convention in London in the UK. Dental Tribune had the opportunity to speak with Align’s Simon Beard about the event, the future of Invisalign and why the markets in Europe offer huge potential.

What was the goal of the GDP convention, and will it be a regular event?

This exclusive event is intended to give our Invisalign providers ongoing education about our product features and insights into best practices from our top providers and help them stay informed of evolving trends, such as a multidisciplinary approach among dental practices. The convention is applicable to current Invisalign providers regardless of whether they are fairly new to Invisalign or have been a provider for some time and are looking to continue their education.

We plan to continue to provide a wide variety of educational events or sessions to enable our Invisalign providers to gain experience and develop the Invisalign provider community, for peer-to-peer discussion and exchanges of best practices.

Your new global brand identity was introduced to global markets several months ago. How has the campaign been received by your customers and clinicians in general in Europe?

The Invisalign brand is one of our most important assets. We have invested over US$0.5 billion over the past 20 years and built the most recognised brand in dentistry and orthodontics. The brand equity plays a vital part in our continuing success—but we are not resting on our laurels and we invest massively in perpetuating every facet of it to maintain this. Invisalign is a clear leader in the specialty, and people know it and ask for it by name. There are a large number of factors that contribute to this recognition and direct patient request, but it is primarily because the Invisalign brand is synonymous with cutting-edge technology, efficacy, pace of innovation, discretion, quality and comfort. Our data shows that the percentage of patients who ask for Invisalign by name is a key driver for new clinicians to seek training so that they can respond to patient requests and grow their practices as a result.

We have invested and continue to invest in the Invisalign brand and raising awareness of consumers, both adults and parents of kids, regarding our treatment options to enhance access to orthodontic treatment and ensure patients ask for Invisalign when looking for a clear option.

Over the past year, we have seen more than 132,000 have searched for a clear option. Of these, over 22,000 interested consumers have taken an Invisalign smile assessment online and more than 135,000 have searched for an Invisalign provider. These results attest to the success of the campaign and that both potential patients and, as a result, clinicians have accepted the investment in the new identity. With the Invisalign Go system, you recently introduced a clear aligner solution for GDPS in several European markets. How has the scope of treatment changed with this new solution?

The Invisalign Go system is a new, simplified approach to tooth straightening that takes GDPS through identifying, planning and monitoring aesthetic cases, enabling them to use the Invisalign system to treat patients confidently right from the word go. The Invisalign Go system is suitable for treating patients with mild spacing issues or orthodontic relapse or even for pre-restorative treatment. With the Invisalign Go Case Assessment Tool, Invisalign providers can assess a patient’s suitability for treatment based on chief concerns and receive a clear indication of whether the patient is suitable for treatment.

Align’s focus is to enable GDPS to treat a portion of the population that would benefit from mild or simple tooth straightening, those potential patients that would not have sought treatment with traditional orthodontic appliances. With ClinCheck and the iTero Element scanner, Invisalign is now part of the ever-growing field of digital dentistry. What have these technologies added to Invisalign treatment?

Digital technology is changing every industry and almost every type of product and service. Digital technology allows providers and consumers to visualise an end goal—such as a better smile. We want to help our customers leverage digital technology to help them provide the best and most predictable treatment options for their patients, and the digital process of the Invisalign system combined with the iTero Element scanner can offer that.

It all starts with a digital scan. The iTero intra-oral scanner replaces physical impressions with a precise 3-D digital scan. This digital scan is the basis of the Invisalign treatment plan. Using Align’s proprietary software, our dental technicians use the scan to create a virtual treatment plan, customised for each patient. In June this year, we launched a software upgrade for the iTero Element intra-oral scanner that includes the ability to compare patient scans over time with the new TimeLapse technology, providing GDPS and orthodontists with enhanced visualisation, assessment and communication tools. In addition, with the i5 software upgrade, patients can now be completed in less than a minute with the same accuracy and reliability practitioners have come to expect from iTero scanners.

We also announced ClinCheck Pro 5.0, the next-generation Invisalign treatment software, which offers the ability to view side-by-side treatment plans, a more realistic 3-D visual model, and a new configurable toolbar for even greater flexibility. Designed to deliver an extraordinary patient experience and increased control, ClinCheck Pro 5.0 also helps Invisalign providers achieve their treatment goals by enabling them to view previously prescribed interproximal reduction values and anterior–posterior correction, with various options to stage the treatment plan exactly as desired.

Constant innovation is absolutely crucial to our current and future success and drive to address unmet needs. Perpetual developments in our software, our materials and the different types of malocclusions we can treat are pivotal to our success.

What will the next generation of Invisalign offer?

Invisalign offers a solution applicable to roughly 60 per cent of patients suitable for fixed orthodontic appliances (ten million case starts per year). With continued feature advancements and ongoing innovation, we believe Invisalign can be applicable to 75 per cent of the traditional orthodontic market, which excludes severely complex cases in which surgical procedures may be needed and young children with many primary teeth.

Whether it is clear aligners, digital scanning, virtual treatment plans or care programs that help patients visualise their new smile, our technology and processes deliver a tremendous patient experience and effective treatment outcomes, and we will continue to advance the technology in all those areas. Align Technology is the only company in the world to date that has an orthodontic database of about five million dental cases, and we use machine learning to mine that data to really learn and understand how we can do orthodontics better, how it can be faster and more convenient for both dentists and patients.

The four-millionth patient was treated with Invisalign clear aligners last year right here in London. How important is the European market compared with other invisalign markets?

The demand for the Invisalign system is growing globally and the UK is one of our success stories. We have helped treat over 4.7 million cases worldwide and the four-millionth patient, which we announced last year, was from the UK. The market here is relatively smaller compared with our largest market—the US—but remains one of our largest markets in Europe. Having said that, clear aligner therapy is still very under-penetrated in the markets we serve, including the UK, and we see tremendous potential for future growth here.

There are ten million orthodontic case starts of traditional wire appliances each year globally, three million in Europe alone. The Invisalign system is applicable to approximately 60 per cent of those cases, of which about a quarter are adults and the rest are teenagers. Add to that the 100 million consumers in Europe that would benefit from simple straightening of their teeth to gain a better smile and you can see the enormous potential for Invisalign clear aligners.

Where can readers find out more?

GDPS interested in learning more about the Invisalign system and our training programmes can go to www.invisalign.co.uk and select “I’m a Doctor” from the top-drop-down menu.

Thank you very much for the interview.
What would Dr Mo Lar do? Part 6

By Richard Lishman, UK

Over the course of an 11-part series, the dentists group will explore ways to tackle a number of personal and professional challenges by providing advice and guidance to fictional character Dr Mo Lar. In the sixth article, Managing Director Richard Lishman explores areas that Lar must consider if he is to fulfil his dream of becoming a principal dentist.

From dental student to associate, homeowner, husband and father, Lar is now at a point in his life where he is considering taking on the challenge of running his very own practice. To achieve his goal, Lar will need to consider a great many factors, including finance, location of the practice, practice premises and type of contract, as well as general compliance and regulatory issues.

The path to becoming a successful principal begins with finding the right practice. Besides needing the requisite experience and financial backing, Lar would have to consider the impact of current market trends and availability. There is no point in choosing a practice that is not financially viable or is beyond his financial capabilities, as he will either struggle to secure the necessary funding or will not be able to sustain the business. Therefore, Lar will need to work with a strong practice sales agent that both fully understands his current financial position and requirements and can navigate him through the process.

**Acquisition process**

No two transactions are ever completely the same, but there are certain processes that are a given during a practice acquisition. In the initial stages of the transaction (heads of terms), both parties’ teams work together to outline the agreed terms of the purchase, including price, the amount of deposit required and legal aspects, such as cost protection, indemnities, exclusivity, confidentiality and price amendment mechanisms. In the intermediate process (due diligence), the buyer’s solicitors work with the seller’s team to raise enquiries about the practice and premises. Typically, this can take between 60 and 90 days, though in the event of complications, due diligence can cause significant delays.

Once Lar begins his acquisition journey, he will need to utilise the services of a specialist legal representative to ensure that the process is handled efficiently and accurately. Required documentation can include a detailed inventory of equipment, information about employees, suppliers and goodwill; up-to-date risk assessments, energy performance certificates, asbestos reports and so on, and three years’ worth of accounts.

The exact processes Lar will go through will depend on whether he purchases a freehold practice or takes on a lease (lease transfer agreement). Whichever he chooses, he should ensure that conveyancing searches are carried out to ascertain whether there are any issues affecting the premises.

Once signed, dated and exchanged, the business sale/purchase agreement/contract is legally binding on the condition that other aspects of the transaction are completed smoothly, such as Care Quality Commission registration and transfer of NHS contract (if applicable).

Lar has experience working in a predominantly NHS practice, so his sights are set on purchasing a mixed practice with an attractive units of dental activity contract. There are several areas to consider here, including whether the contract is personal dental services agreement or a general dental services contract, and if there has been any underperformance by the seller. If so, there would be a risk of a significant claw-back of any overpayment or possible termination of the contract. Only with expert help can Lar hope to navigate through the transfer of the NHS contract.

All buyers are required to register with the Care Quality Commission. Again, this process can be convoluted owing to the number of potential pitfalls—such as late application, use of the wrong form, and errors or incomplete details—so it is always wise to utilise the services of a specialist legal adviser.

**Finance**

Before any of this, though, Lar must review his finances and calculate his affordability. He might have his heart set on becoming a principal, but unless he can prove to the bank that he is a suitable borrower, his dream will be over before it has even begun. This is where an accountant comes in.

An accountant can work with Lar on every aspect of practice finance, including calculating his upper spending limit, putting together a business plan, applying for a loan and selecting a lender. The composition of a solid business plan is particularly pertinent, as a bank will not lend to Lar unless it has the relevant proof that he is a suitable candidate. To maximise his chances of success, Lar would need to include business aims and objectives, a description of services/products, potential weaknesses of the business and solutions to overcome them, a market and competitor research/plan, proposed working arrangements and working hours, as well as accounts and a financial forecast for three to five years, including expenditure, projected profit and loss, and a balance sheet.

Altogether, Lar has a great deal to consider now that he wants to become a principal. With the right help from a team of experts, including a specialist independent financial adviser, lawyer, accountant and sales agent, though, Lar can rest assured that he is prepared for what the acquisition process has in store.