Virgin starts venture in healthcare and dentistry

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LONDON: Unstoppable entrepreneur Richard Branson is moving into healthcare and plans to open centres with general practitioners (GPs) of the National Health Service and other health-care professionals in the UK, including dental teams. The company said the move followed an extensive two-year consultation with key stakeholders from across primary care.

The first Virgin Healthcare centre is expected to open later in 2009; five more centres will follow by the end of 2009. The company plans to work with existing GP practices in their current structures and under their existing contracts with Patient Cooperation Treaties. It also plans to add other healthcare services in consultation with local providers to meet local needs. These could include dentistry, diagnostics, screening, and a pharmacy as well as a range of conventional and complementary therapies.

The company is currently advertising for dental staff on its website, www.healthcare.virgin.com. "Dental care is one of the services we would seek to provide in a Virgin healthcare centre alongside the GP practice," a spokeswoman for Virgin said. "This is an all-under-one-roof concept bringing together primary care services. Dentistry would be one of the private offerings in our range of ancillary services which could also include physiotherapy and podiatry."

The man heading up the venture is Mark Adams, who was previously chief executive of the private healthcare provider Netcare UK and before that was with Denplan. He said Virgin was moving into healthcare because it felt it could make a real difference. "Virgin's expertise in customer service, technological know-how, communication skills and resources can combine with the expertise of primary healthcare clinicians to make that difference in the healthcare sector," he continued.

Mr Adams confirmed healthcare professionals working with the company would retain their independent contractor status.

Use of CAD/CAM dental systems projected to growth

From news reports

TORONTO: The market for newly purchased dental computer-aided design and CAD/CAM systems in the US, Europe and Japan surpassed US$250 million in 2007. It will expand in response to patient and dentist demand for all-ceramic CAD/CAM-produced restorations, which are growing at the expense of metal-based restorations, according to a new report by the Millennium Research Group in Toronto, Canada. Improved technology will also foster the market's growth by enabling manufacturers to raise prices in some segments of the market.

Dental laboratories are increasingly outsourcing crown and bridge computer-aided manufacturing production to milling centres. Accordingly, in the US, unit growth for scanners used in the outsourcing process will reach nearly 20% annually over the next five years. In Europe, this annual unit growth will exceed 20%. "The more labs that can offer CAD/CAM restorations, the better," says Chris Shuttoo, Millennium Senior Analyst. "This will allow more dentists to meet the increasing patient demand for custom-milled crowns and bridges."

In Japan, the market for dental CAD/CAM systems remains very small despite the size of the country's population. Japanese dentists and laboratories primarily use non-CAD/CAM ceramics and metal-based restorations. Similar to other markets, however, as dentists become better educated with respect to the aesthetic and functional benefits of CAD/CAM restorations, the number of crowns and bridges made through the CAD/CAM process will increase. Millennium projects that this will drive a greater number of dental labs to incorporate the necessary technology to manufacture such restorations. Moreover, dentists will add chairside systems into their practice to facilitate increased CAD/CAM restoration placement with a quick turnaround.

Cefla Dental Group takes Chinese Suzhou Victor Medical Equipment

OMOLA: The Italian Cefla Dental Group has announced the acquisition of Victor Medical Equipment, a Chinese-Taiwanese joint-venture specialised in the production of high quality dental units like the AM208 and AM8050. According to company officials, the acquisition will strengthen Cefla's local presence in China, and is key to its strategic expansion into potential growth markets, products and technologies. There will be significant investments in the Eastern China-based production site in Suzhou, and the development of a product range based on the existing Victor brand that will be specifically designed to respond to the needs of dentists in the area whose choice of equipment is based on long-term reliability, quality materials and outstanding value for money, the company says.

Cefla has consistently increased its dealings within the Chinese market through theAnthos brand name. In 1990, the company, with its high-tech technology MyRay in 2007, Suzhou Victor Medical Equipment will become the fourth name in Cefla's brand portfolio.