“We are committed to investing and supporting the development of implant dentistry in China”

An interview with Beat Spalinger, President and CEO of Straumann, Switzerland

The Swiss-based dental manufacturer Straumann recently announced that it is extending its reach into the Chinese dental market. At Sino-Dental 2010 in Beijing, Dental Tribune China Senior Editor Edward Chen spoke with the new President and CEO Beat Spalinger about the company’s plans and commitment to China.

Edward Chen: Mr Spalinger, your company is planning to set up a sub-division in China. What lies behind this decision and will it influence your business strategy there?

Beat Spalinger: China is currently the key growth market in Asia for dental implants or any type of restorative dentistry. There is increasing demand for top quality dental solutions combined with education and service in the country and we have been committed to supporting our customers in the region through our Asian head-quarters in Singapore. So far, the Chinese dental community has responded very positively to this.

However, with the rapid growth of implant dentistry in China, we need to get closer to our customers and strengthen our local presence. Therefore, we have decided to not only continue the partnership with Beijing Focus Medical, but also open our own subsidiary within this business year. Having our own local representation will allow us to understand the needs of our Chinese customers better and to play a more active role in key professional activities such as educational programmes and workshops.

Owing to the global economic slowdown, some dental markets have experienced a decline in the past two years. Why do you consider China as holding good prospects?

Even though China is still at a relatively early stage in implant dentistry, the continuous growth of public institutions, together with the rise of the private sector, give us reason to believe that China will be one of the top three markets globally in the next ten years.

We are committed to investing and supporting the development of implant dentistry in China, focusing on scientific evidence, training and educational activities. This commitment is also reflected in the establishment of Straumann China.

Do you have a long-term commitment to the Chinese market?

Straumann has gained some considerable market share in the past two years that has been driven by our innovative and clinically proven line-up of products and technologies. I am proud to say that we are one of the very few companies, if not the only company, to have an implant system on the market that is supported by ten years of clinical data.

We also believe that our commitment to training and education such as sponsoring implant training centres in Beijing and Hong Kong, or the recently held First International Periodontology Congress in Hangzhou has contributed significantly to our success in China.

Together with Beijing Focus Medical we will continue to seek to gain the trust of dental professionals who wish to offer their patients optimum treatment solutions.

What is Straumann’s current product line and do you plan to launch new products this year in China?

We recently launched our third-generation implant surface technology SLActive, as well as our new generation Bone Level implant range. We also have other offerings like the high performance material Roxolid and our digital solutions portfolio, which have just been launched in initial markets and are to be rolled out globally as soon as possible.

Could you tell us more about SLActive and your new Bone Level Implant?

Our implant systems have been highly successful in Europe and North America, where more than a million SLActive implants have been sold since 2005. Since October 2009, SLActive has also been available in China.

The Straumann Bone Level Implant offers new confidence at bone level through optimised crestal bone preservation, simplified handling (thanks to the new CrossFit Connection), and excellent aesthetic results due to improved soft-tissue management. It complements our highly successful Tissue Level range and enables us to offer a complete system for all indications that can be used with the same surgical kit. We expect the full launch of the Straumann Bone Level Implant later this year in China.

An increasing number of Chinese dentists seem to be incorporating implant dentistry into their practice. How do you think Straumann could support them?

To help dental professionals achieve predictable long-term aesthetic outcomes, Straumann engages in a wide range of educational activities across all specialisations. Last month, for example, we held the ITI Education Week at the University of Hong Kong, a unique event organised in partnership with the International Team for Implantology (ITI) network in Switzerland. ITI will also hold its first Congress in China in Inner Mongolia in August next year.

In addition, Straumann and ITI are supporting their customers by educating patients through various educational material and scholarships that are intended to enable young dentists to study at universities abroad for a semester. The ITI also funds research currently being conducted at Chinese universities.

Thank you very much for the interview.

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