HONG KONG/LEIPZIG, Germany: As part of a multi-million dollar health funding package, the Australian Coalition has granted the University of Adelaide in South Australia AUS$1.5 million (US$1.56 million) to investigate poor oral health in children. The study will be conducted nationwide over four years and involve more than 50,000 participants from private and public schools.

According to a governmental survey, teenage children in Australia have an increased risk of developing dental diseases. Every year, over 20,000 children are admitted to hospitals for dental work, a significantly higher number compared with other countries like the UK, where slightly over 5,000 admissions were recorded in 2009.

Researcher Professor John Spencer from the Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health, who will also lead the study, said that it will look at the organisation and delivery of dental services for children, as well as compare the use and clinical outcomes of school dental services and private dentists. He said that his institute will be partnering with eight state and territory public dental authorities, who will be committing an additional AUS$1.7 million (US$1.78 million) to the project.

“Public programmes like the school dental services are not reaching as many children, yet private dental services may be out of the financial reach of many families,” Prof Spencer said. “The challenge is to identify and eliminate barriers to dental health services in Australia, improving service delivery, reducing risks and promoting healthy diets.”

Australia currently spends less than the US and countries in Asia and Europe on public health care, a 2009 study by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has found. The funding for a universal dental health scheme, a key motivation for the Green Party forming a coalition with Labor in the last national election, was recently scrapped from the federal budget by the Ministry of Health.
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Eiichi Nakanishi is relieved. His company NSK Nakanishi and its staff were unharmed by the 11 March earthquake and subsequent tsunami. Like most Japanese companies, the manufacturer of handpieces and other dental equipment has an obligation to serve its customers in any circumstances. This is the reason Nakanishi says the company is currently working overtime, despite the occasional black-outs, which are still restricting business operations in the country.

Established in the 1950s, NSK has had to face a number of obstacles during its 80-year history, in addition to natural disasters. Production of dental handpieces, for example, had to be stopped in 1945 owing to World War II and was not resumed until 1951. Since then, the small company from Tokyo has evolved into a major international dental player with several business branches outside of Japan. NSK operates not only in major markets like the U.S. or Germany, but also in China, Dubai, France, Spain, Australia and the U.K. Recently, a representative office was established in Singapore to enhance sales and services to customers in the Southeast Asian region.

Since NSK conducts most of its sales overseas, the recession that hit the Japanese economy in 2009 had little impact on overall business results. This relative independence of domestic sales also gave the company the opportunity to invest in new technologies. As a result, NSK launched seven new products at this summer’s International Dental Show (IDS) in Cologne, that, according to Nakanishi, will enhance dental treatment and care for professionals and patients. Besides major updates of their core product lines, such as the Ti-Max Z contra-angle handpieces and S-Max pico turbines, new surgical systems and the iCare all-in-one cleaning system were on display.

Dental Tribune Asia Pacific had the opportunity to speak with Eiichi Nakanishi about the new products and the company’s response to the current situation in Japan.

DTE: Mr Nakanishi, how have your business operations been doing in the aftermath of the natural disasters in Japan?

Eiichi Nakanishi: Fortunately, our staff were not injured and our facilities remained undamaged. As soon as we had confirmed that all our facilities were safe, we resumed operations on 14 March, almost immediately after the disaster. Owing to the occasional black-outs, we have had to stop production four times for a period of three hours each time. However, this has only marginally affected our production output.

A number of companies have announced or launched initiatives to help victims of the disaster. Are you working on something similar at the moment?

Our company has donated a total sum of €200,000 to the Japanese Red Cross Society with the assistance of Corporate Adviser and former CEO Mr Takasuke Nakanishi and Ms Shizuka Nakanishi, the wife of our founder. In addition, we have collected donations from our staff that will support people affected by the catastrophe.

How has the disaster influenced business life in general?

We expect to see some effects in our business operations, particularly in the areas most affected by the earthquake and the tsunami. However, the best we can do right now is to help the population affected by the disaster and work together to recover from these events, which have had severe results.

In your opinion, will this catastrophe have any long-term impact on the dental industry in Japan?

It is too early at the moment to make predictions about the long-term effects on our industry, as we are still in the process of recovery. We believe that the Japanese people will recover from this disaster quickly owing to the Japanese spirit, which embraces such characteristics as endurance, perseverance and dignity.

You have just returned from this year’s IDS in Cologne. What are your general impressions regarding your exhibition there and the state of the whole industry?

I believe that this year’s IDS was very successful for us. We had many visitors to our booth and received great feedback on our new products. Unfortunately, we only met a few visitors from Japan, probably owing to the current situation in our country.

You exhibited seven new products, including new handpieces, scalers and hygiene solutions. In your opinion, what product or products will be of the most benefit to dental practitioners?

All our new products are extremely useful but if I had to choose key products, the Z series contra-angle handpieces, as well as the Surgic Pro surgical micro-motor with excellent durability, reliability and great torque accuracy, will be of most benefit to practitioners.

Are these products already available worldwide?

We will launch these products in Europe first and gradually expand to other regions. Customers will first be able to purchase them this summer.

Your company, NSK, has contributed 83% to our overall business. Are your general impressions regarding your exhibition there and the state of the whole industry?

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“...the best we can do right now is to help the population affected by the disaster…”

Thank you very much for this interview.