Being more in dentistry

The news regarding the merger of Integrated Dental Holdings (IDH) and Associated Dental Practices (ADP) caused a stir when it was first announced at the end of January, with its potential subject to regulatory approval) to create the largest dental group in the UK.

And it is pretty large! When completed, the merger will have more than 450 practices, with approximately 2,000 dental team members treating more than 3.5 million patients per year. But what does this mean for the future of the groups?

To find out, I asked Richard Smith (CEO of IDH) and David Hillier (CEO of ADP) to give me further insight into the reasons behind the merger. Both Richard and David are new to the area of dentistry, but each has a solid background in healthcare. Following a career in the retail sector, Richard spent the last five years as managing director of Lloyds Pharmacy, guiding the business through a period of major change in the pharmacy sector to maintain its position as one of the leading community pharmacy chains in the UK. David’s healthcare credentials span a longer time period, having entered healthcare in 1998. With expertise in dealing within the NHS and with PCTs and the Department of Health from working in the hospital sector, David brings valued experience to the new business.

Richard believes that the current situation in dentistry is very similar to the one which faced pharmacists a few years ago. With a change in regulations and a fundamental need to look at the way the sector worked, pharmacies needed to develop new working practices to survive and be successful. With the shake-up of the NHS system and a return to a more centralised commissioning structure, dental practices have to do much the same. Another similarity he has seen is the fractious nature of dentistry, where working together for a common goal is rarely seen. Richard said: “I feel that by working together we can bring real benefits to patients and also to the careers and professional lives of dentists and the dental teams.”

David’s time with ADP only started in September 2010 so his experience is very similar to Richard’s. He commented: “I’ve only had a short period to get to know the business. We became aware that there was this opportunity for merging with IDH very shortly after I joined so I had to do two things; I first had to know where the business was and where we could take it, and would it [the merger] be a good move for the company and for the shareholders.”

He is very positive that the merger will create a grand future for both the companies and the patients they provide treatment for. “I think it gives a great opportunity to create a company with real scale which is able to actually bring up a new level of professional, to provide better resources, better investment, and better support to the dentists in the field.

“I think the bigger you are you are able to have more resources to use in areas such as training and development – I think it’s one of the big advantages of being a large organisation. I think there are bigger opportunities for people to develop specialist skills in their professional development, both for dentists and nursing staff. A larger organisation would be able to offer better career opportunities and to actually put those skills to good use.”

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Having joined IDH in July 2010, Richard was very much thrown in the deep end of both dentistry and the proposed merger. “Yes it has been a whirlwind introduction to dentistry! No sooner had I started at IDH when we began exploring the possibility of merging with ADP so I had that happening whilst getting familiar with the business at IDH. It has been a challenging time but an enjoyable one.”

Richard is very excited by the future opportunities that’s the merger will provide. For him, it is all about being able to invest in the business and develop it and the dental professionals under its umbrella for the benefits of patients. One of the positives about the merger is that we will be able to invest in our practices and help our teams to continue improving patient care.

“One way we intend to do that is the establishment of a clinical academy, where we can provide opportunities for development for clinicians and all members of the practice. We want to support our staff to develop their skill sets, allowing their ability to offer a wider range of treatments to grow.”

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