“There is a general sense of frustration throughout the world”

An interview with CoDent founders Profs. Dov Sydney, USA, and Mauro Labanca, Italy

With the first World Congress on Controversies in Dentistry (CoDent), Prof. Dov Sydney from USA/Israel and Prof. Mauro Labanca from Italy are aiming to make news by reaching current conclusions to ongoing debates in the field through evidence-based dentistry, as well as expert opinion and speaker–audience discussions. Dental Tribune International had the opportunity to speak with them about their concept, general information overload in dentistry and the upcoming launch of CoDent in Barcelona in Spain in 2016.

Dental Tribune International: Could you briefly introduce your project?
Prof. Dov Sydney: It is called CoDent and it is part of a company called CongressMed, which has developed a model for congresses based on the concept of “Controversies in…” CongressMed’s education is devoted to addressing controversial medical issues in a debate format. Our role is to bring the concept to the dental field, and this involves defining the first topic, finding the moderators and generally advancing the project. We thought it good to start with implants because it is one of the most difficult issues we are faced with as dentists. In this regard, the first congress will address the topic of controversies in dental implantology and will be held in Barcelona from 3 to 5 November 2016.

What distinguishes this congress concept from other meetings?
Prof. Mauro Labanca: We hope to promote real discussions and interaction between practising physicians and researchers on unresolved pressing clinical issues. We do not want to be a substitute for any other existing meeting. For the first congress, we will be discussing implants, but future topics do not have to be surgical ones. Congresses could address adhesive and restorative dentistry or different kinds of treatments in orthodontics. We are not an academy or a scientific society; we already have so many and we do not want to compete with them. We are doing something totally different.

What will the programme cover?
Prof. Labanca: Right now, we have eight topic modules that we feel are very interesting and will foster debate, as well as greater knowledge at the end of the meeting, hopefully. The programmes are designed to provide an effective forum for debate by allowing ample time for speaker–audience discussion. There are not going to be long presentations by one speaker. Instead, we will have very short addresses of about 10 to 15 minutes during which the speakers will seek to answer a specific question. The result will be that, after approximately 1.5 hours, the audience will have had a summary by some of the most important speakers on that topic.
Prof. Sydney: It will be the first time that dental companies will be on the podium together, presenting their best speakers but without the restrictions of having to identify that they work for the company etc. Afterwards, the companies will be able to debate with each other on a number of points. We also aim to initiate an interactive exchange between speakers and the audience with questions via microphone and social networks, in order to cover all the questions that may arise. At the end of each small section, the aim is to have achieved a fair and balanced coverage of the respective subject.

What impact do you hope to have with this idea?

Prof. Sydney: We expect to make news. Up to now, dental companies have mostly marketed their products in a way they think is most appealing to their target customers, but the individual dentist who is going to buy the products, quite frankly, does not have all the information to make a decision. And even if or she does have a sense of direction regarding which implant system to choose, he or she is often not totally sure of the optimum selection. Our concept provides an opportunity to cut through the indecision and doubt. All the companies sitting up on the podium will have the opportunity to explain why their implant is great and the other companies will be able to join in and explain to the audience about their product’s features. The dentist in the audience will then be able to participate as well to obtain the answers that they are really interested in, bottom line — what’s best for me?

Prof. Labanca: In the long term, we hope to initiate an annual meeting that will cover different topics in dentistry. There are many issues that are not so clear and dentists wish to become more informed about these.

So this is an opportunity for dentists to obtain a market-independent view of a certain product or topic in general?

Prof. Sydney: Right. Moderators will monitor the scientific level of speakers and the information they provide. Among the criteria for selecting moderators are that they be well respected in their fields and well known in the academic world. In particular, they should not be connected in any significant manner with a particular company. That is the way we qualify them and that is also what draws the companies in. We represent a programme that is also what draws the companies sitting up on the podium. At that time I probably didn’t have enough cards to play, but now it is the time! The reality dentists are facing today is that companies are approaching them and claiming to have something special and something new. This could be true, but you do not have the means to compare or to confirm whether it is. You could try the products on your patients, but that would not be the right thing to do.

Prof. Sydney: Both of us travel quite a bit. Mauro and I have a good understanding of dentists’ concerns in many parts of the world. There is universally a common sense of frustration regarding the different implant systems. I regard our role as providing a safe, scientifically enabled and controlled environment for implant companies to proactively present the advantages of their systems directly to the end users.

Will there be follow-up documentation after the meeting?

Prof. Sydney: The existing congress model involves a journal issue that is published afterwards and compiled in such a way that it is relevant not only to the event, but also to anybody interested in reading about what was discussed and summarised by creating a permanent and easily-referenced resource.

Prof. Labanca: We would define ourselves as a sort of supervisor in this project. In many countries, dentistry is generally a private practice industry. How can a busy and especially non-academic practitioner properly compare all the information that is available? What will we offer is the scientifically accurate information in order to help them interpret the efficacy and applicability of the message they receive from companies.

You are both dentists. Have you experienced this problem yourselves?

Prof. Labanca: Exactly. When I started with implants many years ago, I had this idea to bring the most important companies together to initiate open and honest debate between them. At that time I probably didn’t have enough cards to play, but now it is the time! The reality dentists are facing today is that companies are approaching them and claiming to have something special and something new.

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