

# Implants as easy as C&B&I

By Danny Chan

**Should implants be made part of mainstream dentistry? Can an implant system be so versatile and user-friendly it makes implant procedures as routine as crowns and bridges?**

**Swiss-Swedish company Nobel Biocare certainly thinks so, and has undertaken the pioneering towards developing componentaries that allow implants to be restored easily – that is, in addition to rendering abutment placement almost effortless!**



**M**ajor acquisitions, new product rollouts and expansion plans. These are the type of news that make the headlines, or so is believed by the PR machinery responsible for churning them out in the form of press releases – mind-dulling material that supposedly inspires journalists to foist upon unsuspecting readers the latest ho-hum concerning so-and-so company. Luckily for us, once in a long while, something newsworthy like Nobel Biocare's C&B&I launch comes along to help break the monotony while generating some real excitement for everyone in the industry.

Two years ago, word came out that the world's biggest dental implant maker would not only be reducing its product lines from 3,000 to 800, but also make improvements to more than 50 existing components, in addition to introducing 380 new products. For a global dental outfit like Nobel Biocare – credited with such legendary proprietary names such as the Brånemark System®, ProCera® prosthetics and Replace® Select implant and bridge – the announcement was anything but pedestrian.

Remarkably, there was not mention of downsizing or staff axing to accompany these major changes. When asked the obvious during a recent interview with *Dental Asia*, Kishore Pranjivan, Regional Director, Australasia/Asia, said: "Our President was very strong in the belief that this is very strong company and the people we have are extremely efficient. We wanted to pull this off without having to eliminate jobs."

And pull it off they did. In November last year, the final phase of Nobel Biocare's integration of its dental business units was completed, following the

successful launch of the advertising campaign in July. The latter event saw a dramatic transformation of the company's public image. Not only did the new publicity materials spot a new logo and striking option – "a new way to think" – the entire corporate metamorphosis was centered on a bold new concept called the C&B&I.

## The C&B&I

According to the company's website, the Crown & Bridge & Implant promotes the concept for "incorporating dental implants into regular crown and bridge dentistry and the benefits of a permanent aesthetic solution." An entire page on the site was devoted to explaining the rationale behind Nobel's new emphasis on implants as the optimal treatment solution.

The efficacy and convenience of a single implant was compared to crown and bridge work, which according to the writer, often had to be redone or altered in cases where continued resorption was a problem. Another reason, explained the online company information, was that the single implant placement dispensed with the need to grind down healthy adjacent tooth to replace a missing tooth, as opposed to conventional methods. Citing recent studies, the writer also noted that profit levels for implants were twice as high as that for regular crown and bridge work.

So whether in terms of convenience or profitability, implants had decidedly emerged as a favourable option. For Nobel Biocare, those reasons were enough to compel a return to the drawing board and start right back at the R&D stages. In the process of re-engineering the products and related systems, the

company had streamlined the assortment to 800 products, the reason attributed mainly to duplication in the product range. More tellingly, improvements were made to more than 50 existing components. The result of this are fuller freedom of choice; better integration of products; increased versatility; and ease of use, among other enhancements (See facing article).

### The Paradigm Shift will benefit everyone

Besides the physical upgrading of its merchandise, the company is also hoping to alter the traditionally held perceptions of dentists who are still reluctant to prescribe implants as a treatment of choice. Towards that end, it embarked on a global advertising campaign in June last year to drive home the message. A thematic series of lifestyle image ads portraying implant dentistry in the same vein as skiing and golfing, among other things, underscore the bold new concept – that acquiring implant skills takes the same, if not lesser effort.

“We are trying to get the message out to the dentists that anything you do in life, whether in playing sports or acquiring further knowledge, requires you to develop certain fundamentals,” Pranjivan rationalised.

“What we are trying to say with our ads is that implant dentistry isn’t all that different or difficult, as it were, in comparison to other things that you do in life, like for example, picking up golf.”

While the sporting analogies may seem palpable upon surface reasoning, one is still inclined to ask: “What about the hordes of so-called trained implant

specialists? What will become of them when GPs take on more implant cases?”

Although built with increasing implant accessibility to general practitioners in mind, Nobel’s systems will be as

tionale is simple: as more and more general dentists begin restoring implants for their patients, most of the newcomers will employ a team approach, thereby increasing referrals to surgeons and laboratories. If the trend picks up as a result, exponential growth in the consumer market will also accelerate an increase in revenue for general dentists, specialists and labs alike.

Perhaps this vision is better illustrated against the statistics, which depict a stark disparity between the percentage of GPs who practice with implants and those who do not. Currently in North America, even though 97% of GPs recommend dental implants to patients, only 20% are restoring a significant number of implant cases. And only six percent are estimated to perform any sort of implant surgery.

This could very well represent that an overwhelming majority of GPs do not feel ready or up to task for implant surgery yet. Armed with an impressive track record and portfolio of well-established implant products, Nobel Biocare is one of the few companies capable of initiating this

turnaround perception that could end up pleasing everyone.

### No price war

In terms of pricing, Nobel Biocare harbours no plans to assail the value-slashing, price-cutting tactics resorted to by lesser known companies prevailing on the market in recent years. However, it remains committed to keeping its products’ cost effectiveness to customers.

“Marketplace perception probably considers prices of Nobel Biocare prod-

**Nobel Biocare**  
Brånemark System™ • Replace™ • Procera™

*The New Nobel Biocare presents  
Crown & Bridge & Implants™ and you...  
taking your skills to a new level*

**C&BI**  
Nobel Biocare  
*A new way to think!*

**Take a swing at implants:** One of the thematic ads that liken learning implant skills to picking up golf.

welcomed by specialists and laboratories. The company believes that everyone will stand to benefit from a perception change that considers implants as part of mainstream dentistry – a development they like to call “the paradigm shift.”

At a time when the world dental community has begun to favor the team approach for implant and other procedures, Nobel is convinced that the season is ripe to tap on the vast number of GPs who have yet to embrace implants. The ra-



ucts being higher than other systems," Pranjivan said, "but when you compare our pricing structure with some of our major competitors like ITI or 3i, you would find us extremely competitive.

"However, we are not necessarily interested in competing with low-end copycat products," he qualified, "and there are a lot of those companies around as well."

Pranjivan further appealed to the logical sense of dentists to consider carefully what ultimately constituted as "major cost savings."

Using the example of the Replace and Easy Abutment combination, he explained that because the abutment comes pre-prepped, very little preparation is required from the clinical standpoint, hence allowing the abutment to be delivered at the time of surgery.

It is clear that the user-friendliness of the Easy Abutment is even more amply demonstrated when the system is used in conjunction with the Replace Select systems. Such is the unique synthesis that currently exists within the new range of Nobel products, exemplifying once again the well-defined objectives in the company's restructuring efforts.

### The truth about Nobel Biocare

In her message for the company's international newsletter *Global Forum*, CEO and President of Nobel Biocare, Heliane Canepa wrote: "There's never been a more exciting or gratifying time to be involved with this industry."

Sharing her optimism, Pranjivan also enthused: "I think implant dentistry is poised to grow aggressively in the next few years."

You may be right to say that such comments are a dime a dozen, especially when enunciated by the likes of CEOs and directors. Even in this sluggish economy, we never seem to hear the abject truths – be they belt-tightening measures or grim market forecasts – anymore. These days, company spokespersons are predisposed to tell a little white lie if it helps to bolster investor confidence and



consumer ratings.

Yet with Nobel Biocare, you get a feeling that the folks up there really mean what they say. I mean, they did take a big gamble with the whole restructuring and streamlining thing. Considering that most companies do not simply remove 70% of their product assortment and introduce changes to existing products that are deemed industry standards, they must have had a darn good reason for it. Prior to the internal reshuffling in 2001, net sales for the year had stood at a healthy £186.41 million. So there were no reasons to believe that the restructuring had anything to do with flagging sales or poor economic performance. The good news is that post-restructuring efforts have paid off thus far. As of 6 February 2003, the group had issued its year-end financial report for 2002, posting a turnover of £199.6 million. The operating result (EBIT) had improved by 55.8%, amounting to £39.6 million.

In this context and that of the implant industry as a whole, one is inclined to be less sceptical of the leaders' rhetoric, even though they do positively glow. Indeed, in fulfilling the company's C&B&I vision of making implants as commonplace as crown and bridge work,

Nobel Biocare inadvertently assumed a broader role than simply turning out the profits.

It cannot help but stay at the forefront of implant technology if it wants to galvanise implant awareness amongst an international community of general practitioners. Its policies and ideas must cater to the divides in global cultures, technology and wealth distribution, not to mention countering age-old dental perceptions.

Suddenly, the term "industry" becomes more than just an affectation used in greeting messages and answering interview posers but an inseparable facet of the core business, around which a whirlwind of innovation must continue to occur and take place.

Certainly both Canepa and Pranjivan know the demands that come with the premise of such large scale developments, but are nonetheless thrilled about its prospects – and certainly see no reason to hide their excitement. With the growth potential of Nobel's systems, who can blame them? To paraphrase Canepa, I think that she really mean to say, "There's never been a more exciting or gratifying time to be involved with Nobel Biocare." DA