Managing oral health for good quality of life

An interview with Dr Stuart Smith, GSK

Dr Stuart Smith has worked as a dentist and teacher in several dental hospitals and schools in the UK. In recent years, he became Vice President of Global Dental Scientific and Professional Communications for GlaxoSmithKline (GSK), a large multinational pharmaceutical company with an extensive consumer healthcare division. DT Asia Pacific editor Claudia Salwiczek spoke with Dr Smith about GSK’s approach to oral care management.

Claudia Salwiczek: Dr Smith, GSK is developing solutions for the oral health management of customers throughout the world. In your opinion, what impact do oral diseases have on people’s lives?

Dr Stuart Smith: Oral diseases can have a massive and varied impact on the lives of individuals, families and communities. Dental caries has been declining in many markets but remains a significant problem around the world not only causing pain for the individual but also days of schooling for children and work days for adults. Gum diseases remain a common reason for tooth loss which in turn can have a dramatic impact on someone’s self esteem. There is a growing consumer interest in the links between oral health and systemic health and the role that dental care may have in the process. Other oral diseases, such as dentine hypersensitivity and xerostomia, can also impact an individual’s quality of life with patients having to modify the way they live their lives to cope with these conditions. Hence improvements in prevention and treatment of dental diseases must remain a high priority.

You have been with GSK for 15 years. How does your work routine in a corporate environment compare to your university experience?

Much of the work is very similar; the objectives of dental academic researchers and industry are very closely aligned. Both are looking for ways to improve preventive and treatment outcomes for patients. Our task is to provide products that enable these improvements and this research and development is inevitably undertaken in collaboration with academic partners.

What does the development process for new products look like?

Oral healthcare fits perfectly within the GSK company mission, which is to help people to do more, feel better and live longer. Within consumer healthcare all products that are developed must be expert reviewed and market reviewed so this means we need to work extensively with external experts and this has led to a collaborative approach to ensuring that our products are acceptable to drive compliance. It is not good having a really effective product if the patient won’t use it.

For some products such as Aquafresh, the flavour and mouth feel are a real bonus driving usage since most people want the therapeutic benefits delivered by fluoride but also like the sensual experience of brushing and the resulting feeling of a freshly cleaned mouth and the confidence that fresh breath brings. It can be a similar situation with dental wearers who may be embarrassed that they wear dentures but find that keeping a denture clean with Polident is a fast and effective way of removing bacterial deposits. The resulting reassurance that denture odour is controlled leads to greater confidence in social settings and improved quality of life. This beneficial outcome provides positive feedback and encouragement to the patient and dentist. For other products it is a tougher challenge to deliver the efficacy with the additional layer of patient acceptance because the active ingredients that are required for the product to work can have a negative impact on flavour. The task is then to deliver the optimal sensory characteristics without impacting the efficacy. When a new product hits the shelf extensive testing will have been undertaken with large groups of consumers who have used the products at home in real life conditions for prolonged periods to ensure patient acceptability.

In summary, dental healthcare professionals and consumers are at the heart of everything we do. It is our goal to develop products that experts want to recommend and patients want to use.

Dr Stuart Smith can be contacted at stuart.smith@gsk.com.

“Thank you for this interview!”

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Contact Info

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