20 years of education

*Dental Tribune* talks to Dr Edwin Scher about 20 years of implant courses at his Walpole St practice.

Trying to have a sensible conversation with a man in a three-foot high green hat is not easy. Fortunately it was not the time to be sensible for long as the man in question was Dr Edwin ‘Eddie’ Scher, and he had an important mission to address the guests at his annual party held at London’s R.A.C. Club.

This was not an ordinary party, falling as it did on St Patrick’s Day (hence the large hat, well I hope that was the reason anyway). This year marked the 20th anniversary of the opening of Eddie’s Walpole St practice in London as well his very popular implant courses.

Eddie has been running teaching programs for 20 years now, and has taught more than 700 clinicians on his courses at Walpole St. Eddie said: “1990 was a very desperate year for me as it was the year my father died, but it was also the year that we opened Walpole St. I was also passionate about developing the one or two-day courses that I was asked to give by companies, but I wanted to take it one step further and develop a course that took a broader view. This means that delegates really need to know more than what a company is going to tell them, they need background, they need background literature and they then need enough knowledge to make decisions themselves rather than doing what they’re told. And so my courses were born!”

“We ran it as a year-long course. In the first year, we were fully subscribed, in the second year, we were double-subscribed, so we put on two identical days in a row. In the third year, we were triple-subscribed and were doing three days, and by the third day, I was brain dead. We then took a step back, said ‘this is crazy’ and decided to do just one a year. It’s been going very well, always fully subscribed for the past 20 years.”

During the 90’s the course remained popular, with delegates flying in from all over the globe to take part. Although this was a very satisfying position to be in, Eddie was concerned about the course format for people who had to travel great distances.

“About 10 years ago we were concerned with people flying in from so far, for example from Hong Kong, so we tried to create a course for out-of-towners in a different way, so we formed our year-long course into six intensive days from Sunday morning to Friday afternoon.

“We started the course in the October (2000), and it got fully subscribed, it was very popular and a good way to teach, as the practice was busy enough to do what we did on the year course - taking one patient from initial exam to surgery to fitting the prosthesis. But, you couldn’t use the same patient on the six-day course. However, the practice was busy enough that you could use a different patient for the same implant in the same region at different stages. And it worked well. It’s worked well since.”

Eddie has strong ideals about how his course should be taught: “My ideal is group size is 10, 12 is really the maximum. With more it becomes difficult for people to ask questions. If there are only 10 people in the room, it’s a beautiful interactive group.

“I do make a statement right at the start of the course on the Sunday morning. That statement is that I will never ask a direct question to a person. I will ask many questions throughout, but it will be to the group. I will never embarrass or chastise an individual. It’s up to each delegate
to interact as they wish and not to be bothered. You can feel a sigh of relief going through the room once I've said this. And of course I do stick to it, I would never like to embarrass someone."

Talking about the course itself, it’s easy to get carried away with Eddie’s quiet enthusiasm for what he teaches: “I want my delegates to understand the principles of what they’re doing, rather than painting by numbers. I want them to understand what they need to ask a representative when they come to their practice.

“What I teach isn’t specific to any of the implant systems, I am expecting that by the end of the week is that delegates will have an understanding of their own capabilities, so they are able to decide for themselves what they can do. They will certainly have the knowledge to treatment plan a simple case, they will have the knowledge to place an implant in a simple case, and restore that implant in a simple case.

Eddie is very clear that course is not meant to be the end of a delegate’s training in implants: “I very often help [delegates] decide how to proceed in their careers after they’ve done my course. I consider my six days as a comprehensive, but basic introduction. I then suggest that they should do a two-day advanced surgical course, which was part of my year-long course. It’s not so they can then go on to do a sinus graft procedure. What we really need them to know is how to diagnose and treatment plan for a sinus graft procedure, and instruct someone who’s competent and capable to do it for them, before they’ve learned how to do it. I think that’s really important, that they know their own competence.”

Eddie believes that much of what is successful about both his practice and his courses is the team he has around him: “We have a good relationship in the practice between all members of staff and I think we all work very hard to create that.

“We’ve got two hygienists, three dentists, a specialist periodontist one day a week and for the rest of the time a cosmetic dentist, me, practice manager Diane, senior nurse Sarah, Laura (my nurse) and Tanya downstairs, and my wife in the background running the courses.

“Some of the team have been with me a very long time, for example Diane has worked with me for 25 years. She says she’s going to retire, but she’s going to retire when I retire. Sarah has been with us for 10 years and is my right hand. She’s wonderful and works to keep everything together. Laura has been with me for two and a half years and is one of the most competent and loyal nurses you’re likely to meet. She always looks after me, to make sure I don’t miss anything or forget something.”

Eddie is not just about his course though. “I think what makes me tick is that I have such a wonderful and varied life in that I am an oral surgeon, I love my surgery, I have my operating theatre, I’m never disturbed in it, and it’s something I love doing. But I’m also a prosthodontist, I carry out my own crown and bridge work, which I love and it’s another part of my life.

“I’ve got two sides to my clinical life, and then I’ve got teaching which allows me to travel the world. I’m also chairman of the editorial board of Implant Today, which gives me a nice outlet as I write editorial for them every three months. I’ve also been invited, by Prof Ucer, President Elect of the ADI to be scientific advisor/chairman for the two years while he’s in office in 2012-15.”

Although he’s been practising for almost 40 years, Eddie has no plans to hang up the drill just yet. “I love dentistry. I actually LOVE it. When people talk about retiring, they ask me if I can afford it. Yes, I can afford it, but I have no intention of giving up. I don’t know what I’d do. I don’t even have an exit strategy for the practice. As far as I’m concerned, we go on. I’m enjoying it so much, so there’s no reason to stop. Certainly my sight and my hands are as good as they were 10 years ago, so I am very happy to continue. My biggest problem in life is that I took up golf five years ago thinking I’d be superb, but I’m rubbish. I’m getting better, but if you ask me my handicap…”

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