

## THE CHANGING TRENDS IN DENTISTRY

**Lt Gen (Dr) Vimal Arora, MDS**  
**Chief Clinical Officer, Clove Dental**

In India, the Oral Care infrastructure had 1, 80,000 registered dentists as of 2012, providing serving to over one billion population through their dental practices. In addition, there are an equal number of unregistered qualified dental surgeons and quacks practicing dentistry in the country. As far as the overall ratio of dentist to population is concerned, there has been a marked improvement. The great majority of dentists prefer to work in private clinics which are thus experiencing an impressive growth as there are hardly any job opportunities in the government sector. The average dentist in India operates out of a solo clinic. This sector is a predominantly unorganized part of the country's health care market. The businesses are mostly mom-and-pop shops; dentists have a habit of marrying other dentists and function as a team. Increasing no. of quacks in the industry is another area that emerges and becomes a threat in this disorganized sector. Every year approx. 20,000 to 30,000 new clinics start in the country. Currently 99% of the patients visit private clinics as government funded healthcare is very inadequate compared to the private setups. Most practices are solo with multiple operator. Recent trends are for group practices. Many groups have started chains of dental clinics which is heralding a new era in Oral Healthcare. Many more companies are in the process of starting a chain of dental clinics.

In stand-alone clinics, the dentist spends a large time of his day looking to back end process such as staffing , salary, training, sterilization ,stocks and marketing that he has little time left to do what he/she is best at. The overheads are large, thus leading to compromises by the practitioner in the most important area of sterilization, where none should be made. For the common man, this leads to little transparency, uniformity in pricing or even information-sharing around the problem at hand and the range of options to address it. For a middle-class family, it looks too intimidating an experience to negotiate unless absolutely necessary.

As a part of a larger group of dental clinics, there is an easy accessibility to all specialties which otherwise a solo practitioner may or may not be able to hire. The initial investment for the doctor for setting up the practice goes down and become very affordable, thus attaining profitability becomes much easier and quicker. The doctor can then do what he does best i.e. treat patients in the best way. Problems of accessibility, transparency,

ethics, sterilization and quality are assured and practiced as a rule. Pricing becomes within the means as chains deal with volumes which lead to driving the pricing lower without compromises. The patient management software that are used help transcend the boundaries of state and country. Patient records can be retrieved or accessed by their doctor from any part of the world.

The corporate chains are also fulfilling their moral duty of spreading awareness towards CSR activities which is excellent for the profession over a long run. It is sad to see that the profession over a period of last 7-8 decades of existence has not been able to address this major anomaly and bring about a change in the perception of the people's minds about dentistry, the dentist and the need for treatment. The corporate are filling this void very effectively and educating the masses by disseminating information about the dental diseases, their impact on over-all health, preventive aspects and the treatment options thus generating excellent opportunities for the profession to step in utilize the opportunities for better future.

These emerging trends point to dentists becoming more a part of a systemic approach to overall health and wellbeing. Dentistry has thus become much more main stream than it has been in the past. More collaborative associations are being seen between medical and dental health professionals. It all points to a new kind of dental practitioner, one who's willing to accept change on all frontages, yet at the same time being patient-centered.

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### About the author:

**Lt Gen Dr Vimal Arora**, PVSM AVSM VSM & Bar; OSRE (Oman) is the Editor-in-Chief of the Journal of Dental Health & Research. He is presently working as the Chief Clinical Officer of Clove Dental, the Largest Dental Chain of India. He manages more than 350 clinics and 900 dentists for delivery of dental treatment at all echelons in 27 cities across the country. Gen Vimal has a 40 years history of working in the Army Dental Corps. He superannuated as the Director General of Dental Services & Colonel Commandant of Dental Corps and was appointed the Honorary Dental Surgeon to the President of India. He was also a Member of the Dental Council of India. He is the highest awarded Army Dentist, four times recipient of the Presidential Award in India and once from Sultan of Oman. He is the author of several research papers in highly acclaimed journals and also a celebrated writer for his books on dentistry.