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Prospects for the 35th International Dental Show Cologne next month look promising, representing the entire German dental industry have agreed. At a recent press conference in Cologne, they also rejected fears of economic setbacks due to the ongoing financial crisis. According to Dr Martin Rickert, Chairman of the Association of German Dental Manufacturers (VDDI e.V.), there is still a steady demand for medical and dental services. DTI Group Editor Daniel Zimmermann spoke with Dr Rickert about the current state of the industry and his expectations for IDS Cologne 2009.

Daniel Zimmermann: Dr Rickert, the economic evaluation of the German dental market in 2008 was fairly positive. Has this changed with the current financial crisis?

Dr Rickert: Not really. As you correctly point out, it is predominately a financial crisis. The industry’s outlook for 2009 was good and currently there is a trend towards a stable return which does not fulfil all our expectations but still promises to deliver satisfactory profits.

There are certainly fluctuations in various market segments and world markets that stem from different influences and are not attributable to a single cause.

There have been initial reports on redundancies in the United States. Should we be preparing for setbacks or restructuring measures in Germany as well?

The US health sector differs from that in Germany and in most European countries. Therefore, many private investors have been affected by the financial crisis. Mass redundancies in key sectors mean that many people can no longer contribute towards company health insurance schemes in the US. This will definitely not be the case in Germany because the statutory health insurance provider and private health insurance companies are prepared to cover the healthcare costs for their clients in the future. Even if we are in for job losses in various economic sectors, there are not likely to be any negative effects on the German healthcare market.

What positive effects will IDS have on the industry?

The 53rd IDS will again exhibit a comprehensive range of modern dental products and technologies. Visitors will therefore once again experience an abundance of new product and service innovations. Technological developments in the medical field and our industry’s investment in research and development continue to provide an abundance of service new and improved solutions for dental practices and laboratories, which are of interest to dentist and technician alike.

IDS has always been a driving force behind the dental market and will remain in this role in the future. I expect our partner-dentists, dental technicians, dental hygienists, and prosthesis-labcasists to be able to service patients that are investing in their health is the best way to secure their own well-being and quality of life. Investments in health are therefore in one’s own future. I am confident that despite the current economic fluctuations patients will not very much neglect their oral health or decide not to make use of necessary care and treatment. Falling prices for energy, the commuter tax relief fund, and private savings assets of around €110 trillion in Germany ensure the liquidity of a large portion of the population. Moreover, patients’ demands for health-related services are mostly governed by acute health problems and the desire for a return to health and recuperating quality of life.

Dental implants and automated fabrication of dental restorations are currently the fastest growing sectors in dentistry. Is this boom reflected in the products and services that are going to be presented at IDS?

Implant-related innovations are in fact one of the fastest growing sectors, with more than 700,000 dental implants placed in Germany last year and an annual growth-rate of around 10 to 15 per cent. These high-quality restorations will continue to be in demand by many patients in the future because they are one of the most progressive and long-lasting restorations available. Incidentally, the growth in dental implants in Germany can largely be attributed to the fact that statutory health insurance schemes have subsidised this treatment since the introduction of a comprehensive coverage system in 2005, IDS will exhibit the entire range of modern implantology systems, presenting both innovations and developments in tried-and-tested systems.

What other sectors do you view as having potential for growth?

Apart from implantology, I see the most potential in the all-porcelain sector. Around 25 million restorations worldwide were fabricated using CAD/CAM technology. Modern laser scanners are able to realise this potential. With a cost of around €100,000 reflecting points a second, and image-capturing has become quicker and more precise. Modern high-performance materials provide the best possible stability for a wide range of indications and are able to guarantee biocompatibility at the same time.

The latest digital fabrication technology using laser metal sintering of, mostly precious metal, free, alloy powders can now also be considered for prosthetic and restorative applications. These dentures stand out because of their incredibly precise fit and durability.

German dental industry export activities are now increased by approximately two per cent in 2007, which comprises 33 per cent of the total turnover. Is the domestic market losing its importance?

There is no doubt that Germany remains a key market. It is here that the German dental industry researches and develops new products and services in collaboration with universities, research institutions, technical colleges, and training schools (Meisterschulen). We must ensure that this market is opened up for our products and services in con-