

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

ADVANCED DENTAL TRAINING IN SIN CITY

In the first of two articles from Las Vegas, Arjun Kachhala reports on his visit to the LVI, The Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies



Arjun Kachhala

Las Vegas is a comparatively small American city in the state of Nevada with a population of 600,000. In 2005 the city of Las Vegas celebrated its 100th birthday and in 2009 according to official figures more than 36 million people visited Las Vegas, 'The entertainment capital of the world.' So what better place to set up an advanced dental training institute!

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In late January 2011 as part of a planned five-day trip to Las Vegas, I visited the world famous LVI, The Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. The LVI is a vast private dental training institute founded by Dr William Dickerson in the early 1990s. His vision was a place where dentists could learn advanced skills with the best equipment and facilities. At the time it was said that it would only last six months. 15 years later the gamble seems to have paid off. LVI has over 9,000 alumni, an independent training institute in Australia and is considering setting up similar ventures in Europe and Asia.

The LVI's success story also tells the story of how the demand for training in planning and treating complex cases took off in North America and Europe almost two decades ago and why it is one of the world's leading dental training institutes today.

This is part one of my visit to the LVI, part two is a fascinating interview with the clinical director of LVI, Mark Duncan, including his views on British compared to American dentistry and the future as a whole.

VISIONARY FOUNDER

After a long flight into Vegas I was raring to go. After a 30-minute cab ride to the LVI,



LVI occupies 64,000 square feet on the outskirts of Las Vegas

which is just outside the main city, I met LVI Clinical Director Mark Duncan who introduced me to Tucker DiEdwardo the LVI president who took me on a detailed and revealing tour.

Tucker began by telling me how the LVI story began. Whilst looking after a young family and practice in Las Vegas, LVI founder William Dickerson used to travel frequently between Vegas and Texas where he was involved in teaching cosmetic dentistry at Baylor University. Eventually he started training programmes at his practice in Vegas, with four to seven dentists at a time. This started growing into hotels and conference suites, and then in 1998 he sank everything he had into building the facilities at LVI.

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Clinical facilities include 20 chairs, allowing up to 60 dentists to be on the same course with staggered sessions

FACILITIES AND TRAINING PROGRAMMES

You really don't get a sense of the size and energy of the place until you've been on campus; it's much bigger than I expected. The campus is privately owned and can have as many as 800 people on site at one time.

We started our journey in the imposing grand rotunda, a central domed area where morning registration takes place for courses.

Advanced courses are split into seven levels of attainment called 'core levels.' On a typical course day, you would be picked up by shuttle bus from nearby accommodation 10 minutes away and be taken to a full breakfast on site - all part of the service.

Tucker proudly pointed out that LVI's key selling point is live patient training for advanced skills on complex cases. 'We take trainees step by step through the entire process of diagnosing and treatment planning complex cases all the way through to preparation, provisionals and fitting. Training dentists bring a patient with them to do the treatment on, under the direct supervision of clinical instructors chairside at LVI (dentists that have previously been through the training programme).'

Courses are organised and set up so that through clinical photography and video links, at the end of a complex case everybody's post operative pictures are displayed in turn and they literally celebrate and congratulate their colleague's work and learn from each other's cases in an exciting and positive environment.

Smaller and more intimate breakout rooms

are available for team training programmes which run alongside. If something is being taught in one building it can be shown in any other building on the campus thanks to modern audio-visual and wi-fi capacity.

In all, LVI offers 44 different courses, ranging from practice management, periodontics, implants, hygiene, team programmes, eight to 10 veneers courses, occlusion and neuromuscular dentistry and full mouth dentistry.

As we continued our tour, I began to realise that the entire campus appeared very well thought out and planned. Covering an impressive 64,000 square feet, the campus is split into two buildings by virtue of additional land that was purchased, plus an extension in the last decade.

There is space for 20 clinical chairs and they can have as many as 60 dentists on the same course at the same time, staggered so that 20 are training clinically one day, the rest are in lectures. One chair had a permanent set up for a live demo link to any lecture hall complete with cameras at different angles and microscopes.

On both sides of the campus two separate but remarkable modern lecture halls are available accommodating 400 or 770 delegates theatre-style, with the flexibility for halls to be separated with sound proof walls when smaller groups are required.

We moved on to the laboratory training facilities. LVI was ahead of its time when it believed that one of the most important

components for success is the relationship of the lab to the dentist, so it was one of the first to offer comprehensive dental technician training programmes alongside the clinical programmes. The emphasis on the importance of having the right team was evident when I saw training rooms for up to for 56 technicians at one time, all with modern computerised workstations.

Tucker was eager to summarise the unique LVI way and the benefits: 'In the end our ethos is dentists having fun, training in a postgraduate setting, teaching a centralised philosophy called neuro-muscular dentistry, and training dentists to improve their clinical and practice management skills.' LVI is incredibly proud that LVI graduates get paid for the quality of work that they do. A recent independent study showed that where the average North American dentist nets \$160,000 per year, the average LVI dentist nets more like \$320,000 per year, working a lot less (three to four days per week).

MY THOUGHTS

LVI has succeeded because it offers something unique - live patient training with a clinical instructor right next to you. When it comes to complex multi-disciplinary cases in dentistry or with whatever you do, there's nothing like having your hand held. That's how they teach you to fly an aeroplane or to drive a car. You can read a book or listen to a lecture about learning to fly/drive all day long, but at some point you have to be brave in getting behind the wheel, ultimately you have to do it yourself. Similarly, we can learn a lot about dentistry in a lot of different ways and via lots of techniques that are in magazines and books, they make sense and you can apply it. With some of it you can make that leap. Some of it just doesn't work as well until you've actually done it - so what better way than to learn with someone by your side looking over your shoulder guiding you.

I think William Dickerson made it incredibly easy for somebody to learn this type of advanced dentistry successfully. Clearly lots of thought has gone into enabling LVI to be the success story it is today. However, Dickerson also had a fantastic



LVI was one of the first training centres to offer comprehensive dental technician programmes alongside clinical programmes and can accommodate up to 56 technicians at once in its lab facilities

vision and it's clear that his team share that vision. By the end of the tour, I realised the emotion and pride that LVI's team felt and the tremendous passion and energy they all shared with each other, it was truly inspiring.

There are other smaller and medium-

sized postgraduate facilities and training programmes that do really good things in the UK and worldwide. LVI, however, seems to be the most comprehensive and because of this there are more things it can offer.

In my opinion, the UK urgently needs

something like this. A very large, well-equipped national training facility, with the best minds and current thinking coming together to create similar mentor-styled programmes. I have many colleagues and friends who do not feel confident trying out things in their own practices for fear of failing or not having the immediate assistance you would get from this type of training. More and more dentists from the UK are even travelling abroad because the courses aren't available here. Seeing what LVI is doing, I can see that dentists are starving for this in the UK, and the time is incredibly ripe. Any volunteers?

To ask a question or comment on this article please send an email to: comments@ppdentistry.com

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