

Interview with Dr Antonio Bowen, Madrid, President of the Sociedad Española de Implantes (SEI)

Dental implantology in Spain



Since 2014, the Sociedad Española de Implantes (SEI) has had a new President: Dr Antonio Bowen is an oral surgeon and implant clinician from Madrid. EDI Journal has asked him about the situation of dentistry and dental implantology in Spain and the problems dentists are facing.

Dr Bowen, how interested in dental implants are patients in Spain?

Patients in Spain are highly interested in dental implants because they are looking for the best solutions for their oral health, and implants are considered as the superior treatment option.

Are patients well informed about innovative techniques and treatment options?

Patients know that dental implantology exists. But the overall publicity and the information bias that is a result of the ubiquitous access to the Internet interfere with a sound knowledge of the treatment options with implants.

How interested in dental implants are dentists in your country?

Dental implants account for more than 40 per cent of the dental market in Spain. They are essential for any dental clinic. Dental implantology is one of the most interesting fields for dentists, as demonstrated by the fact that 50 per cent of all courses in dentistry deal with implants or related issues.

How do dentists view dental implantology – as a welcome challenge or as undesirable?

The roots of modern implantology in Spain lie in the late 1980s. However, only a small number of dentists embraced it in the 1990s because the older generation did not believe in it. Then, in the 2000s, implantology took off on a broader scale, marking the transition to modern dentistry; practically all dentists and dental clinics incorporated dental implantology in their daily practice.

What type of education or postgraduate training does a dentist (or physician) need in your country to be able to work in dental implantology?

All dentists can work in dental implantology because there are no official dental specializations in Spain. However, it is widely believed that postgraduate training for dental implantology is necessary. Therefore, we have many academic master programmes (which take two years) especially for implantology, as well as master programmes in oral surgery or periodontics, where students get specific implantology-related training.

Furthermore, the official Spanish association for implantology SEI offers programmes of a shorter duration for implant training, and the dental industry provides trainings for their specific systems or products.

What is the total number of dentists in your region and throughout Spain?

In Spain, there are more than 30,000 registered dentists, and in my region – Madrid –, there are more than 10,000, which means approximately 30 per cent of all dentists in Spain.

How many of them are active in implantology?

We think that some 40 per cent of the dentists are working in implantology, in surgery, in prosthodontics or a combination of them. But only two per cent of all dentists have earned a postgraduate degree in implantology.

Is it an attractive proposition in your country to be an active dental implantologist? If so, why?

Many young dentists want to work in implant dentistry because of the complexity of the treatments, but also for economic reasons. Problems arise with low-cost clinics which employ young dentists who cannot perform treatments adequately because they lack appropriate working conditions. The conditions have even worsened for dental implantologists in recent years, so that many of them are moving to other fields of dentistry. >>

Are there any specific regulations for dentists offering implantological treatment in their practice?

There are no specific regulations. You only need the official dentist degree and a dental clinic which meets the official requirements and is certified by the Spanish health authorities.

Who pays for an implantological treatment, and how?

In Spain, patients always pay for their treatments. In clinics owned by a dentist, the patient pays when the medical treatment is completed, but in low-cost clinics patients pay when the treatment starts – in many cases with financial assistance from a bank.

This situation has produced considerable problems as so many low-cost clinics in Spain went under in the crisis. Many patients who paid treatments in advance are left without doctors and without money, but they still have to pay their monthly rates to the bank.

What percentage of the cost is borne by patients, their (statutory or private) health insurer and/or other institutions or organizations?

Patients pay 100 per cent of the cost. Public institutions pay nothing at all.

What are the problems implantologists are facing in your country?

The real problem is the huge number of dentists. The private colleges do not impose ceilings on admissions. Moreover, the low-cost clinics are changing the way the dental market works in Spain: Dental clinics are becoming businesses rather than being healthcare institutions.

The main problem may be the absence of a law stipulating that the owner of a dental clinic must be a dentist. Moreover, the legal regulation is unsatisfactory when it comes to misleading advertisements and a strict ban on advertising in health care.

How do you believe dental implantology in your country will develop – as the ideal solution in prosthodontics or as one concept of many?

For many years, implants have been the best solution for replacing missing teeth and for other dental treatments. These days, most of the dentists consider implants as one of various prosthodontic solutions, but not necessarily the best one.

I think that over the next years, the use of dental implants will be governed by strict protocols. They will have significance, but not quite as much as today.

Please name three topics you would like BDIZ EDI to assign priority to.

Treatments protocols for periodontitis; GBR for vertical bone augmentation; treatment options for the atrophic posterior mandible.

What are your wishes for dental implantologists in your country?

My wishes are the same for the whole field of dentistry in Spain: limits to the number of dentists, limits to the number of new students of dentistry, the creation of a new official specialization in dental implantology, regulation of (or an outright ban on) health advertising; and a law which stipulates that the owner of a dental clinic must be a dentist or a company owned by dentists.

I would like to see dentistry and dental implantology to be a health service for people and not a business. I am aware that this is already the case in the majority of countries and I think that it would be easy to achieve in Spain, too. In these days, we go through the consequences of the current situation: low-cost clinics closing, patients abandoned, legal fraud ... a puzzle that is very difficult to solve.

What would be the significance and the objective of an international professional journal in the field of dental implantology?

I think the significance is evident: It is the best means of communication for all implantologists and a very good panel to present current scientific knowledge, new products and the consensus in the field.

What would be your favourite topics for a panel discussion or an international symposium?

New techniques for bone regeneration, stem cells therapy applied to bone regeneration and new technologies in dental implantology.

Dr Bowen, thank you very much for this interview!

Portrait of Dr Antonio Bowen

- Medical degree (MD): Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM)
- Dental degree (BDS): UCM and Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE)
- Doctor in Medicine and Surgery (PhD): UCM
- Oral surgeon: Training and residence in Hospital Gregorio Marañón, Madrid
- Postgraduate in Implantology (Udico programme): University of California Los Angeles (UCLA)
- Fellow of the European Board of Oral Surgery: EFOSS
- Head of the course of Dental Implantology: Universidad San Pablo CEU (1999–2004)
- Professor at the Facultad de Medicina, UCM (1993–2008)
- President of the Sociedad Española de Implantes (SEI): since 2014