

Interview with Dr Markus Tröltzsch on greeniu

Sustainability is not achievable by dental practices working on their own

When it comes to sustainability in the dental practice and to “green dentistry”, initial steps have been taken by various groups and associations to address the topic. Dr Markus Tröltzsch takes a different approach. Together with his brother and another partner, he founded greeniu GmbH. In this interview he explains his motives, goals and hopes.



Exactly what is greeniu, Dr Tröltzsch?

The question can be answered in two ways, emphasizing two distinct aspects: as far as its corporate standing, it is a classic limited liability company (LLC; “GmbH” in German) that offers a service, namely, to simplify tasks and to empower medical businesses embarking on the path to sustainability.

But the more exciting aspect is the principle underlying greeniu. It is an LLC of medical institutions—which includes physicians, dentists, physiotherapists, pharmacists, anyone who is active in the medical field—who have the declared goal to make

the practice of medicine beneficial for both humankind and for nature. In short: practicing medicine as sustainably as possible.

The greeniu platform gives medical professionals access to relevant areas of knowledge and practice processes, and to relevant products that actually are more sustainable, as far as can be ascertained—advising them how to work more sustainably themselves. But the platform is also about serious possibilities to compensate for those aspects of medicine that simply cannot be made more sustainable because, after all, we put the safety of our patients first. This part of our impact we should be able to compensate for by connecting with reputable projects that help us do so. Greeniu is part of the United Nations Climate Initiative and through it has access to the UN climate offset projects, and this in turn ensures that the platform is an integral part of a larger context.

Sounds professional. Who is behind this?

It started with us—my brother and me—trying follow a path to sustainability in our own practice. We soon realized that if we were to be serious about this, we could not go it alone. This is not about just doing things a little better, it is about making the practice sustainable using a scientifically based approach, from process management to the products used, and all that without compromising the safety, practicality, success rate and efficiency of our processes. And, of course, the process should remain affordable. We understood that we really had to put our efforts in a larger context. That is why we created the LLC.

By now, many well-known personalities from the worlds of medicine and dentistry are behind this endeavour. On the web you can see some of them presented; Professor Schlegel, for example, is one of them. The goal of these supporters is to jointly bring the project forward. Increasingly, industry circles are also signalling an interest.

Why not go non-profit?

Important question. In the end, non-profit means that the overall structure must resemble that of a club or association,

and of course that no money can be made. We made a conscious decision to make money from this project so that we have funds available to invest in the further development of sustainable medicine.

For example, our research funding scheme will take off this year. We are making a dedicated effort to strengthen scientific efforts, and for the financial support to come from a company would seem more appropriate to the purpose. In this way, it is possible to work through collaborative schemes. This provides an incentive for other profit-oriented companies to take an interest in promoting the idea of sustainability.

Overall, as a “non-non-profit”, you are much more flexible in your structure, and you can make significantly better use of the money flow you generate. Of course, non-profits also earn money, and they spend it on association structures or the like. In the context of non-non-profits, the process can be made much more transparent.

Who may participate and in what form—as a member, as a shareholder?

A prerequisite for membership is that you must work in the field of medicine. Members sign up for an annual membership. Right now, the majority of our members are physicians and dentists, but of course pharmacists, osteopaths, medical journalists—medical professionals in the broadest sense—can also be members. We are targeting anyone who keeps medical and dental operations running. For now, membership is by invitation only so that we can manage our growth somewhat. In the longer term, however, membership will be freely accessible. I am not sure we can get there this year. As a next step, we will approach various professional societies and give their members the opportunity to participate.

Whither the journey?

The idea is to provide opportunities for developing standards to move sustainable medicine forward at a serious scientific level. The moment everyone plays their own little game and implements their own little rules, (a) we lose all structure; (b) we lose all credibility; and (c) we will not get the whole industry moving in the same direction.

The problem is that if I did this in my own practice, I would not have much credibility, because there are just way too many definitions floating about. Which, by the way, is another reason why we did not implement this on our own. With greenvui, we are creating a standardized approach that can work for medicine as a whole, and we will also use it to try and establish a uniform system across many countries. Patients should know that when they frequent a greenvui practice, they support a practice where sustainability is a priority—but not at the expense of their safety, and not at the expense of the success of the treatments practiced there, but in harmony with the overall sustainability goals. At the moment, we have members in 22 countries. So we are slowly evolving.

Does this put you in competition with those associations that have discovered “green dentistry” as one of their topics?

Not at all. I think it is great that there we have come to an understanding at different levels of how much we need sustainability in medicine and in dentistry. And it makes sense to think in different directions. The problem with the various activities, however, is often that it is basically once again the dental or medical practice all by itself that is supposed to implement everything. We think that that is a problem, because going it alone—from identifying sustainable products to process management—is actually pretty costly, and it gets us back into that trap where there is no comparability, no uniform standard. Any and all activities in this direction are highly welcome and worthy of support, and wherever opportunities present themselves, we would also like to move forward together. After all, the idea behind greenvui is that much of the work of becoming sustainable is done by greenvui on behalf of the practices.

What are the benefits of the activities for the individual member? The greenvui poster—is that powerful advertising?

First of all, each member receives a certificate of membership. All members compensate a mandatory 10 tons of CO₂ per year via a project within the scope of their membership. This is a fixed part of the membership, and it cannot be “deselected”; or in other words, each member is already taking a step on the path to serious sustainability.

Members get access to sustainable products in addition to all the process guidelines for their practices. These products are not randomly thrown together but have been selected by us in a lengthy process, and the products are at least as good as or better than those we use by default in the practice. Members get these products at a lower price than they would otherwise receive by suppliers, as a membership benefit. This is a financial incentive.

We also offer social media and PR support to members. Our members-only area offers content that can be used for the various news channels. The content has been prepared by us but can of course also be customized to point out to patients that the practice is taking the path to sustainability.

Thank you very much, Dr Tröltzsch, for your comments.

This interview was conducted by Anita Wuttke, Editor-in-Chief.

