



Colin Stanley is the new president of DOCS, ICON's contract resourcing business. He talked to **Joanne Payne** about the importance of global knowledge and a fortuitous job offer that led to where he is today.

Colin Stanley joined ICON in 2001 and has spent the last decade in a number of leadership positions in the US, Europe and Asia Pacific. Prior to joining ICON, he worked for Quintiles in its data management group. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biotechnology from Dublin City University.

Did you always want to work in healthcare?

The sciences were always of interest and I took all science subjects available to me as part of my secondary and third level education. There was a point in time when I considered studying to be a physician, but ultimately I followed a more technical path by studying biotechnology. My interest in healthcare and specifically clinical trials came later, when I started working in the industry.

How has your career path led to where you are today?

After many years in data management, including heading up ICON's EU DM group, I led a global, cross divisional, process improvement initiative within ICON. This experience gave me a different, more holistic perspective and understanding of our business, as well as a better understanding of the challenges of change management. I then had an opportunity to move within ICON to live and work in the US, with a position in clinical operations. That gave me experience of living and working in a different region and it added practical, operational understanding to my then theoretical knowledge of the clinical business.

In 2008, I was offered a position in Asia Pacific, which evolved into vice-president of clinical operations for Asia Pacific. This required extensive travel across Asia and working across multiple countries and cultures. My current position as president of DOCS represented an opportunity to run a division as well as move back to Europe and closer to home. The DOCS resourcing business is another shift in terms of experience and opportunity as it focuses on insourcing as opposed to outsourcing solutions. The experience of working across regions and disciplines has given me a deep understanding of the clinical trial business. Managing budgets in all of these regions and disciplines has taught me a lot about what drives profitability and growth.

Is this the career path you expected to follow?

Not really! In reality when I finished university, I only knew that I had tired of lab research work for a while. I felt a drive towards business and finding a commercial application to my education. In fact, a fortuitous meeting between my mother (a school headmistress) and one of her student's parents (an HR manager), led to my application to Quintiles, and my move in to the industry. So I am still thanking them both for that, as over time I realised what a great opportunity it had represented.

What has been the highlight of your career so far?

There have been many highlights associated with the opportunity to work and travel abroad. I have enjoyed and learned a lot about myself, not to mention the industry, and met some interesting and inspiring people. Probably the most intense and most rewarding experience was working with my colleagues in Asia Pacific, whose determination and ambition is always energising. I am 10 years with ICON this month, so the fact that I have enjoyed success and am still motivated after a decade with ICON is perhaps the highlight.

What do you enjoy most about your career?

I value the responsibility of being in a leadership position. There is a simplicity that goes with knowing that ultimately, a decision rests with you and understanding that responsibility is important. I value the trust given to me by ICON's board and executive team and the empowerment that goes with that. Having that level of responsibility means that sometimes you have to take the rough with the smooth, but personally I find that energising.

What do you find frustrating about the industry?

All of us who work in the industry know it to be conservative at times. But in reality, it is that way for good reason. Tough regulations, slow decision making, slow adoption of technology, or innovation are not unusual. But the industry has responsibility for such a significant number of people, that as frustrating as the conservatism may sometimes be, it is entirely understandable.

Would you recommend the clinical trials industry to new recruits?

Absolutely. Even though we have experienced economic uncertainty in recent times, and seen the results of that in the industry, I believe the CRO world has fared relatively better than some others. And if (like I was) you seek an opportunity to combine a science background with an interest in business, then there are lots of roles of real interest.

What drives you to succeed?

A sense of accountability for the decisions I make. As mentioned earlier, I value the responsibility of leadership and decision making, and on this basis feel obliged to do my very best within any role I have.

What ambitions do you have for the future?

Right now, I thoroughly enjoy my job. ICON's DOCS business is rapidly growing and has ambitious plans for the future. We are further developing our FSP business as well as improving the existing permanent and contract staffing business units. We are implementing new technology, expanding our geographic scope and setting some aggressive targets for 2012 and beyond. I suspect that will keep me busy for a while!