

COVID-19 AND THE DENTAL PROFESSION: A NEW HOPE

Dentistry is facing its darkest hour yet, with the growth and spread of the Coronavirus pandemic. Dental surgeons are at the highest risk of contracting and transmitting the Coronavirus, alongside paramedics, nurses, and other healthcare workers. With the pandemic still on the growth curve, there is no hope of revival anytime soon, compounded by zero earnings by dental practitioners and staff at clinics. A novel coronavirus was identified as the causative agent and was subsequently termed COVID-19 by the World Health Organization (WHO). Despite rigorous global containment and quarantine efforts, the incidence of COVID-19 continues to rise. In addition, studies have shown that respiratory viruses can be transmitted from person to person through direct or indirect contact, or through coarse or small droplets, and 2019-nCoV can also be transmitted directly or indirectly through saliva. Dentistry and dental treatment closely deals with the oral cavity and saliva of the patient. A large number of dental procedures generate aerosols, which increase the chances of spread of the virus, making dentistry one of the high risk professions. While over a 100 vaccines are being formulated all around the world, research states. Additional time would be required for large scale production and distribution of the same. Dentists have no option but to shut down their practices and treat only cases that require urgent care.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted how dental care can be safely delivered in the short term, and likely will stimulate permanent changes in how dental care is delivered. The profession will need to consider a number of unanswered questions; for example, whether the workflow and layout of dental clinics and dental colleges should be permanently reorganized, and whether expanded PPE is warranted for care of all dental patients as part of Standard Precautions. The COVID-19 pandemic presents several opportunities for dental researchers to focus on key issues. Important research priorities may include estimating the costs and benefits of expanded PPE use (and other changes in dental practice workflows), developing and testing innovative approaches to minimize aerosol generation during dental procedures, testing and validating tele-dentistry models, and evaluating alternative dental workforce models, such as dental therapists and dental hygienist.

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