

The pandemic among us

Rohit Kulshrestha

Department of Orthodontics and Dentofacial Orthopedics, Terna Dental College and Hospital, Nerul, Navi Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

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Editor's Note

We have heard news channels talk about the corona pandemic and the future economic disaster that would follow. There have been panel settings in studios to talk about tourism, hotels, leisure, garments, automobiles, educational institutions, electronics and many other industries that would be hit hard because of this worldwide outbreak [1].

Dental clinic & hospital earnings suddenly dropped to zero as COVID-19 began spreading and many countries have come to a standstill. Advisories and reports from various international agencies came to light, and dentists were forced to shut down their practices. The Dental Fraternity has yet to raise a voice about the disaster that dentistry is going to face. Over 50% of dentists already live in a financial crunch. As no oral health improvement programs are being promoted, advertised and no talks about dental insurance a majority of dentists would suffer greatly. Many dental clinics are operating in rented premises. Some landlords are being cooperative while most are demanding rent whether or not the clinic is operational. It is their right and there is no way a dentist can fight against it.

The present scenario has stopped all non-emergency dental services. We have been advised to stop all elective services. Many dental set-ups have employed helping staff including receptionists, chair-side assistants, and associate dentists. With such a small number of treatments happening, it would be unlikely that a dentist could bear to pay the salaries of helping staff. The first person to lose the job would be the associate dentist as there would be no clinical over-work to be handled. This will increase unemployment in the fraternity. Furthermore, the public is already afraid as the news of dentists being at the highest risk for COVID-19 circulates over social media. There is truth in the news and we cannot oppose it. This news would push the public away from dentists towards pharmacists as a resort for analgesics instead of getting the treatment done. As the lockdown has restricted the functioning of other industries and there is a general financial instability, patients are already hesitant towards getting "costly" dental treatments. With little or no earning, private dental practitioners are forced to resort to drastic measures. They are either paying their staff half or zero salaries. Most have already been sent packing. The present situation is so bad and future so miserable, that there are continuous messages from dentists shutting down their practices and selling the material.

As per the report published in *EClinicalMedicine*, April 2020, 100% of patients treated for dental problems in Wuhan, China were found to be corona positive within days of getting dental treatment. Dental clinics were found to be the most contagious zones and were shut down at the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak. If the

words of dental dealers are to be believed, then over 80% of dental set-ups don't have the basic sterilization protocols in place. Will such an unprepared majority of dentists be able to cope up with the regulated sterilization & disinfection protocols? (Such as provided by WHO-HKU collaborating center, or, CDC) [2].

As per the new guidelines, dentists and assisting team needs to work with a full-body covering PPE suit, goggles, face shields, N95 FFP3 masks, surgical gloves, shoe covers, along with single-use chair covers, light covers, and single-use instruments as far as possible, etc. All these are going to skyrocket the Cost of Treatment. With an increasing number of doctors reporting to be positive for COVID-19, is the dental fraternity trained & prepared to work under strict aseptic protocols?

HealthAssure (a health care aggregator) agency is expecting a maximum of 25% of usual traffic in hospitals in the coming months. Comparing this to dental specialty, we would be working at less than 10% of the usual footfall. This drastic loss of patients would force close a huge number of dental centres across the country. Unless a high-level program to educate and inform the public about oral health awareness is started today, a good number of dentists will be forced to leave the profession by this year-end. As dental care is needed in every nook and corner of the world, dental set-ups fulfilling all the requirements can be utilized for providing dental services. School Dental Health Program must be immediately and strictly implemented engaging 1 dentist per 2000 students. The future of complete dental fraternity is at stake!

References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Transmission of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID19).
2. Sabino-Silva R, Jardim ACG, Siqueira WL. Coronavirus COVID-19 impacts to dentistry and potential salivary diagnosis. *Clin Oral Investig*. 2020;24:1619-21.

*Correspondence to:

Dr. Rohit Kulshrestha
Department of Orthodontics and Dentofacial
Orthopedics
Terna Dental College and Hospital
Nerul
Navi Mumbai
Maharashtra
India
E-mail: kulrohit@gmail.com