

## EDITORIAL

## COVID-19: A DEFINING MOMENT FOR THE DENTAL PROFESSION

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India crossed yet another grim milestone of 1 Crore (10 million) COVID-19 cases on December 18, 2020. The UN Secretary General, *Antonio Guterres* very rightly said “The virus does not discriminate, but its impacts do”.<sup>2</sup> Strict lockdowns and isolation measures imposed by the governments of several countries tackled the spread of the dreaded virus to certain extent.<sup>3</sup> However, these measures rendered many people jobless. The pandemic effect thus has not just been limited to physical health, but has affected financial, social and psychological health of individuals and triggered economic slowdown across the globe.

Dentists do not just face the threat of going out of business but are also highly susceptible as they are exposed to both the routes of transmission, i.e. aerosol and the direct contact with patient during treatments. No doubt, that the dental profession has adopted the most stringent precautionary measures; however, accidental breaches are known to occur in the medical field which jeopardize the complete disinfection process putting all staff at risk. Since, most of the dental procedures produce aerosols which remain suspended in the air for varying lengths, the risk of spread of virus to dentists and their staff is greater.<sup>4</sup> Dentists not only fear getting the contagion themselves, but also worry spreading it to their families and new patients.<sup>5</sup> Though, new innovations in the form of high-speed suction units and constant fumigation devices are already available, the adaptation to these recent gadgetry is far from satisfactory by most clinics.

Dentists over the years have been dealing with the oral micro-flora of thousands of patients which has always been rich in viruses, bacteria and other organisms. Each dentist must have had an exposure to aerosols for 6-8 hrs daily running into many years. However, this new virus poses problems of different dimension and the solution to fighting this new

respiratory virus lies in strengthening the core values of dentistry, viz. ‘Sterilization & Disinfection’. The practices of sterilization and disinfection have been ingrained in the very soul of dentistry, since the origin of the first dental college in Baltimore in the year 1840. Even so unfortunately, the true adoption of the core values remain neglected by most dental professionals.

The emergence of SARS CoV-2 has come as an epiphany to the Indian Dentist; dawning the ultimate realization amongst the dentists that sterilization and disinfection are mandatory and to be followed stringently. The Indian dentist now has evolved in their practices to include measures like most recent equipment like aerosol reducing suctions, fumigators and UV chambers for fear of disease to self and the family. This also brought in the issuance of PPE to patients, new norms of physical distancing & triaging which made patients less apprehensive of the dental clinic. All this effectively has brought in a newfound awareness about the asepsis, not just among the dental fraternity, but also the common man.

Dentists today are filled with belief and confidence for the future, because now they feel that they are well prepared for any abominable virus or bacterium. They have emerged as the true COVID warriors, who knowing fully well about the implications of treating possible infected patients, went ahead and looked after their clientele without the fear of consequences. The Indian dentist now has learnt how to rise to the occasion and adopt and adapt and at the same time act expeditiously to thrive in any situation that may come their way because when the going gets tough, the tough must get going!

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