

Guest Editorial

DENTISTRY IN THE POST COVID-19 WORLD

With the advent and widespread use of vaccines against the COVID-19 virus, the world finally seems ready to begin its journey into the post COVID era. Like the rest of the world, dentistry had also grind to a halt.

Aerosols, a routine byproduct of our work had now morphed into a carrier of a potentially fatal disease, for both patients and dentists alike. All the focus during this pandemic was on limiting aerosol generation and its expulsion from the dental offices so that they can stay open to provide services to the community and also sustain the families and households attached to these practices.

Like the previous pandemics, which served as stepping stones towards better infection control practices, the COVID-19 pandemic actually served as a validation of the Centre for Disease Control (CDC) and Health Technical Memorandum (HTM) 105 guidelines in helping to protect dentists from this disease. One large scale survey conducted by the American Dental Association on 2400 dentists found that less than 1% were afflicted by the virus. Those afflicted had actually contracted the disease from family members, and not their practices. This shows that while following the minimum standards was protective, there is a need of moving towards the best practice standards to maintain and increase the quality of dental care.

This pandemic has also served as catalyst for the growth of teledentistry, online conferences and webinars. There is now renewed focus on how to limit our dependence on handpieces and bringing back hand instruments for caries and calculus removal. Replacement of restorations is now old news, and more attention is being paid to its repair. All this is being done to reduce aerosol production and exposure as it will take up to a year or more to ensure worldwide vaccination. Hence the threat of a virus mutation and a potential fourth wave are risks still at large. Therefore, some of these changes are temporary and some might become permanent. All these lessons must be kept in mind and regularly refreshed as we learn to practice dentistry in this new world.

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