

Dentistry x Covid-19 = Uncertainty?

Meenakshi Ray*

Department of Dental Surgery, Associate Dentist, KSD Jain Dental College and Hospital, India

***Corresponding Author:** Meenakshi Ray, Department of Dental Surgery, Associate Dentist, KSD Jain Dental College and Hospital, India.

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In October 2015, 218 villagers were asked to submit blood samples in Jinning county, China. The villages were adjacent to caves, which were home to a variety of Coronavirus-carrying bats. The blood samples were tested to find that nearly 3% carried antibodies against SARS-like coronavirus. Bat-to-human transmission of the coronaviruses was then brought to light for the first time ever.

These viruses are known to have a high rate of mutation and are prone to recombination in humans and animals alike. This Pandora's box in a remote corner of China when opened, turned out to decimate the world economy in a year! The pandemic has been labelled by economists as a 'black swan'-postulated originally by Nassim Nicholas Taleb, it is used to describe the impact of unprecedented events that come as a surprise in societal aspects. A pandemic often results in global recession, which has impacted the first half of 2020 and will take a long time to recover.

Before the pandemic, people were investing heavily in dental chains and specialist dental centres over the last decade. Every tenth advertisement on television was for an oral healthcare product. Dental tourism in India was expected to grow leaps and bounds at 30% per annum. The Indian dental service market was projected to increase at a CAGR of 7.34% over the next 5 years. Indian dental care market was approximated to roughly \$1.79 billion in 2020, with a yearly growth rate of 6.8 percent.

The Indian government employs only 7,239 dentists out of the 2.7 lakh dentists already registered with the Dental Council of India (DCI). The majority of the other section are self-employed, practicing in private dental clinics or hospitals, mostly in urban areas. They provide employment to an equal number of staff required to run these clinics.

Analysts estimate that up to 20 percent of dental practices in India may be forced to close down if the lockdown persists beyond May. Dental procedures are categorised into Aerosol Generating

Procedures (the majority are AGP) and non-aerosol generating procedures (non-AGP). AGP carry a very high risk for virus transmission to both staff and patients. Patients suffering from dental emergencies, where medication is not working, will have to be treated in hospitals following stringent infection control regulations. Lockdown will have serious impact on the oral hygiene of people as most are postponing going to the dentist with the help of pain-killers and/or antibiotics.

Some factors which would need to be taken into consideration, in light of the current pandemic are:

- Provision of personal protective equipment, equipment and material for sanitization by the government at subsidized rates.
- Easing of taxes for the next few years with interest-free loans for the industry.
- The government should come up with a business insurance plan for dentists and their staff for their protection.
- Elective surgeries/non-emergency treatment to be postponed till further notice from each government.
- American Association of Endodontists (AAE) has created a patient screening protocol which should be used even after lockdown is lifted.
- Staff management has to be taken into consideration as salaries would still need to be given in order to support dental and non-dental staff during such financially challenging times.
- Hiring of new dentists would also be considerably impacted. Corporate jobs may face more difficulty.
- Insurance companies may have to compensate all of their policyholders over a long span of time.

In all probability, until a vaccine is miraculously discovered, the virus is here to stay. Society will have to adapt over time to working from home, less travel, increased flu vaccines, more online retail therapy and Netflix, virtual learning-It is the beginning of a strange dystopian future. The road to recovery will be uphill- arduous and prolonged. But this pandemic won't be the last one and we must be better prepared to overcome the next challenge. The above measures help healthcare professionals to be more efficient in tackling health issues in the new decade and also bring in much needed investment into healthcare. We hope sincerely that a vaccine can be discovered soon enough which will hopefully normalise the art of dentistry and the situation worldwide [1-16].

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