

Dental Practice in Pre-Covid and During COVID Times

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Description

The word Coronavirus is not uncommon anymore with its worldwide scare and rapid spread. There is not a field which has not been affected directly or indirectly. The maximum onus has fallen on the medical and the dental professionals to operate under such high risk. Infection control measures have done a makeover with inclusion of personal protective equipment, respirators in addition to the existing measures like 3-ply masks, gloves and eyewear. The investments on redesigning the dental operatory to counteract the risk of infection have been heavy with additions like HEPA filters and other sanitization measures.

During the first COVID-19 wave, most of the practitioners were in the dark about the protective measures to adopt, treatment procedures to carry out, the imposed restrictions on dental practice by government and the fatal implications upon themselves. The sequelae were progressive dental conditions due to unavailability of care, seizure of regular dental check-ups leading to neglect and overlooking serious conditions like oral cancer. Only emergency care was rendered and that too in compromised form. Due to the fear of contracting COVID-19 many dental practitioners rendered only dental-check ups leading to severe financial duress and had to even close down practice. Most of the Medical, Dental and Nursing professionals took the major brunt of this disease with many deaths being reported in this sector.

The budding dental professionals also took a veritable hit in their academic and clinical learning. Most of the graduate and post graduate examinations relied on models rather than patients leading to reduced authenticity of the examination system. The patient numbers have failed to reach the pre-covid proportions due to the previous postponements, pre-treatment RT-PCR testing and general fear of contracting covid infection.

The efficiency in performing complicated procedures has come down due to impediments like face shields, respirators and heavy full coverage gowns.

The online survey questionnaire on 'Dental Practice in Pre-COVID19 and Future Perspectives' revealed that a greater number of the dental professionals in India are dependent of private practice and consultations. The commonly performed dental procedures in pre-covid times was root canal treatments and restorative treatments followed by dental extractions.. Due to the first covid wave, source of income has disrupted for majority of the younger dental professionals. Dental professionals had to look for alternative sources of income in order to sustain financially. Majority of the dental practitioners (65.8%) felt that financially they could sustain themselves only for another 6 months with only a minority (10.8%) they could manage more than a year. Most of them felt that the scenario has led to a reduced income with inability to take care of the expenses of the dental clinic as well as paying the co-workers. All in all, most of them would like to counteract this problem by raising the cost of treatments (71.2%). The other alternative seems to be reduced working hours and number of co-workers.

Although the solid hit of covid crisis has been taken up by the dental practitioners in, the worst affected section is the budding practitioners. The acceptance of covid vaccination is equivocal. Though the investment on sterilization and asepsis has shot up, to take the situation in a positive light, it is a very good development - the adaptation of universal protection measures. There is no ambiguity about the hike in charges for dental treatment. Also, the pandemic has highlighted the need for alternative source of income. With the impending third wave of covid, the overall attitude towards utilization of dental treatment seems to be 'Make hay while the sun shines' for both clinicians and patient

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