

# Oral and maxillofacial surgery in the time of COVID - What it means for India?



Even while the pandemic caused by the novel SARS CoV-2 virus is on the wane, it has left in its wake an enormous burden on global healthcare.<sup>[1]</sup>

The direct and indirect effect on the practice of the young specialty of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery (OMFS) is yet to be assessed in full. However, several reports about the pandemic's impact on training suggest that it had a negative impact in 2020. According to Brar *et al.*, in the USA, OMFS programs (100%) implemented guidelines to suspend elective and nonurgent surgical procedures and limited ambulatory clinic visits by the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of March. The report further suggests that since Dental, Maxillofacial Surgery, Otolaryngology, Anesthesiology, and other specialists involved in manipulations of the upper aerodigestive and respiratory systems were at high risk, the services have been seriously affected. Training of OMFS has also taken a hit because of fear and stress among the residents and trainees, whose mental and physical welfare was a cause for concern.<sup>[2]</sup>

This seems to have been the pattern across the world where residents continued didactic training, seminars, and discussions with decreased clinical work. There was a sharp fall in the number of cases being treated in institutions, as well as in private practices. This is based on a survey undertaken mostly in the Americas and Asia in May 2020. There was universal deployment of triaging, resulting in a steep fall of elective surgery, while only trauma and other emergent procedures continued unhindered.<sup>[3]</sup> Hence, complete was the impact on the medical community that even publications of articles were affected. Springer, for instance, had sent out a notification extending timelines for peer review and publication deadlines.<sup>[4]</sup>

The pandemic continues to restrict practice and training in several European and American countries which have seen new waves in the early months of 2021. However, in countries where there is a flattening of the curve or decline in cases, including India, the practice of OMFS is limping back to normal.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us how fragile health systems are in dealing with epidemics and pandemics

and how crippling they can be to every aspect of life. It has also taught us how to cope with such exigencies by resorting to a range of alternate mechanisms to stay on course. Some of the changes that were forced on us include our adaptation of distance learning through virtual platforms and even medical care through telemedicine. A plethora of web-based seminars and lectures have brought knowledge and learning into our homes. It is perhaps the forerunner to a revolution in surgery as well. Several institutions have opened skill laboratories and simulation training platforms. It may perhaps hasten and facilitate newer avenues in surgery, like robotics, that have not been applied in practice despite being available as a technology for many years.

As we move into a new post-COVID era, OMFS is poised for major changes. Over the next few years, India may have the largest number of OMFS in the world. If it has to qualitatively compete as the new center for OMFS practice and training, our opportunity lies in our ability to embrace new technologies.

The COVID pandemic, despite the enormous depredations it has caused, may in fact be the reset button that gives us the opportunity to catch up and become a leader in OMFS. We now have a head start. It only remains for us to seize the moment.

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