

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

If COVID-19 becomes endemic will the current dental guidelines still remain valid?

In a recent paper, the authors Jamal et al reviewed various guidelines published by dental societies of the world for the prevention of transmission of COVID-19 virus in the dental care setting during the current pandemic (Jamal et al., 2020). While this review is very interesting, I have a genuine apprehension that these guidelines may not be valid for a long time and very soon new guidelines will be required in the unfortunate event of COVID-19 becoming endemic.

Patients of COVID-19, during the early phase of infection, release large amounts of infectious viral particles in the form of droplets from cough, sneeze and respiratory secretions, which are the main modes of transmission of the virus (Peng et al., 2020). This mode of transmission, especially from asymptomatic or pauci-symptomatic patients, puts the dental professionals at an increased risk of infection. Multiple guidelines have been published by various dental and healthcare associations for the dental professionals (Alharbi, Alharbi, & Alqaidi, 2020; American Dental Association, 2020; British Dental Association, 2020; CDC, 2020; Indian Dental Association, 2020; Martins-Filho et al., 2020; Peditto, Scapellato, Marcianò, Costa, & Oteri, 2020), and the main recommendation of these guidelines has been to postpone all the routine dental procedures and to carry out only emergency dental procedures, till the time this pandemic gets over (Jamal et al., 2020). As a result, during the current pandemic, most routine procedures performed by the dentists all over the world have been suspended, and only emergency procedures and surgeries are being performed.

However, looking at the current increasing trend of COVID-19 cases, it does not appear that this pandemic will end anytime soon. In fact, Dr Mike Ryan, the Executive Director of the World Health Organization's Health Emergencies Programme, stated in a press conference on 13 May 2020, "this virus may become just another endemic virus in our communities, and this virus may never go away" (BBC News, 2020). Although the vaccine research is going on at a breathtaking pace, it is unlikely to be available in the market anytime soon and vaccinating each and every person may take several years.

If COVID-19 becomes endemic, what will be its impact on the dental practice? Will the existing guidelines of postponing all the routine dental procedures still hold good? Dental professionals cannot keep their routine dental practice suspended permanently as it will have a huge impact on their livelihood. It will also cause distress

to the general public who might be forced to take the services of unqualified quacks for their day-to-day dental problems.

The only solution in sight to this problem seems to be the cautious resuming of all the routine dental procedures with appropriate evidence-based precautions. These precautions should be adequately effective in preventing the spread of the virus and cross-transmission of infection. In addition, these preventive measures should also be cost-effective so that the high cost of enhanced sanitation and doctor's personal protective equipment (PPE) should not burden the patients.

Hence, all the existing guidelines, which had recommended suspending of all the routine dental procedures till the time this pandemic gets over, need to be critically revised. The new guidelines need to be formulated for practicing dentists for cautious resuming of all non-emergency routine dental procedures such as scaling, root planing, endodontic and restorative treatment, prosthodontic treatment, orthodontic treatment and oral surgery treatment. The recommendations should focus on being adequately preventive and cost-effective, without exorbitantly enhancing the cost of dental care.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Suhani Ghai: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Methodology; Project administration; Writing-original draft; Writing-review & editing.

KEYWORDS

coronavirus, COVID-19, dental, dental practice, public health

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