

Impact of Covid-19 on Dental Profession; A Scoping Review and Solution Outcomes

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On, 11th of February 2020, WHO (world health organization), declared the outbreak of coronavirus strain as a global pandemic and termed it as COVID 19. It is the virus that causes the infection of upper respiratory tract and is highly contagious and its detrimental effect was more aggressive in the elderly and people with low immunity, thus globally effected the people at large and the different aspects of life. To control the spread of the virus many countries had to shut down their educational and government institutes, parks, restaurants, markets, shops, restrictions were put on social gatherings and various sport events, medical and dental training programs, except the healthcare facilities.¹

Though dental professionals were not working on the front line yet their close contact with the COVID patient and nature of dental procedures; the chances of cross infection from the exposure i.e. droplets (saliva and blood) and aerosols splashing from the oral cavity, injury from sharp instruments and needles, contact with blood and saliva, inhalation of respiratory droplets, touching contaminated surfaces and inappropriate use of personal protective gear and equipment; while treating a patient, puts them at a much higher risk of contracting the virus, also the cost of Personnel Protective Equipment (PPE) is high as it has to be changed with every patient, along with disinfected measures to be taken with each patient therefore putting the dental practitioners in the financial burden which has raised a widespread concern and uncertainty among the dental community.^{2,3}

The protocols have made incredible changes in the government and private dental practice thus bringing huge loss to the economy as dental treatment in many countries including Pakistan, were restricted to emergency procedures only that too with extreme strict infection control protocol. This has put great amount of pressure on the dentist that were running their own clinic and few of them had to close their running clinic for a limited time or on permanent basis. Others had to face a financial plunge thus leading to a general trait of anxiousness and uncertainty among the dental practitioners, particularly in the private sector. The government in many developed countries have helped through financial policies and loans to overcome the losses, also many different insurance companies were engaged to overcome the financial plunge. However, the underdeveloped countries have yet to come up with such policies to lift the financial burden as to protect their practices from closure.⁴

The 'New York Times' published an article on March 2020, under the title; "The worker who face the greatest coronavirus risk", and it was concluded that dentist were at the highest risk, even more than the nursing staff and general physicians. Considering the current situation, dentist have suffered from severe anxiety, which can lead into a panic mode and force you into irrational behavior losing your ability for decision making which is utmost importance when comes to dental procedures. Though many dentists were unwilling to treat their patient's pandemic, but preventive guidelines published by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), World Health Organization and American Dental Association (ADA); helped the dental practitioners to become more compliance and vigilant, hence, the treatment schedule were continued keeping in mind the infective preventive guidelines.⁵

Changes such as wide extended, reception and waiting areas for the patients; assessments, prescriptions, and supervision by Tele dentistry; emergency given priority whereas the necessary appointments catered, negative pressure rooms and high-power suction can make the spread of droplets to minimal. Also following standard operative procedures example sterilization, N-95 mask and use of protective gear; increasing the awareness by different programs workshops and posters towards the hand hygiene will enable the smooth running of dental practice in pandemic and in future too.^{3,6}

It is commendable that many dentist have risen to the challenge in our fight against covid-19. Dentist in general have gained moral esteem and self-confidence, which has groomed them both as person and as professionally. Pandemic rarely occurs and practical experienced gained as to how to deal with such crises has become a life lesson for not just dentist but all the medical practitioners. Together they have pull through the crises and emerged stronger than before and working towards the betterment of community with each passing day.

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