

Dentistry in the Time of COVID

4-26-2020

We have all been through the most unusual and frightening two months. For most of us, nothing in our past or, probably, in our future will compare the complete societal upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now what?

We will not go back to normal. We will go forward, to a new normal.

During this great pause in our normal lives, dental offices across the globe have become dormant. We took care of emergencies involving trauma, infection and pain but otherwise we suspended all normal care.

This accomplished two key goals. First, it eliminated one possibility for spreading COVID-19. Second, it allowed the limited supply of masks, gloves, sanitizers, etc. to be diverted to the most essential facilities. It also gave dentists time to study, time to envision the new normal and time to prepare.

I have been serving on a Task Force for the Arizona Dental Association designed to provide guidance to the dentists in our state for safely practicing dentistry under these new circumstances.

The “stand down” order from the Governor expires on May 1st. But that does not mean that we are back to normal operations. What was accepted as safe and normal in February is inadequate in May. Some changes will become permanent and some will only be necessary during the 1- 2 years it will take for the risk of new infections to drop to a “safe” level.

Your next visit will look and feel very different. We will provide an infection control safety level never before seen in dentistry. You will immediately notice new protocols in how we manage contact before and after treatment. You will be screened, and only staff and patients determined to be in the lowest risk group will enter the office.

Clinical care that involves water spray will now involve much higher safety measures to protect us all. You will undoubtedly wonder if our new measures are over the top. I assure you we are studying all the reputable science; we do look at cost/benefit, but we will err on the side of caution for the next year or so.

My father died of COVID-19 last Monday, April 20, 2020. He was in a nursing home in the Detroit area and despite excellent care and precautions, he did contract the disease and at age 94, he had little ability to fight it.

Between the loss of my father, my work on the task force, my desire to protect my patients, and the awareness that the clinical dental team is *the* most at risk group of health care providers – we will provide you with the highest level of infection control dentistry has ever offered.

We will open in phases and go slow in the beginning. But you will be safe when you return.

Michael R. Thompson, DDS