

EDITORIAL

Inevitable change: The “new normal”



A year ago I wrote an editorial about personal wellness in the setting of caring for patients. Shortly after that publication, the world changed considerably due to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic. As I write this, there are over 30 million reported cases, and we are approaching nearly one million deaths worldwide. This has affected all of us in multiple ways and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. We are social beings, and the impact of quarantine has been extremely difficult. Climate change, economic stressors, travel restrictions, decreased social interaction, social unrest, and more all add to the fear of the unknown and escalate our anxiety about the new normal. Compounding this is the known fact that the new normal is continually in flux as we learn more about COVID-19 and how to manage it.

Many of us health care providers are at the front line in treating patients during this pandemic. Those of us who care for patients' oral cavity needs have added risks due to proximity of interaction, physical contact with secretions, and aerosolization issues with procedures resulting in potential spread of the virus. We are caring for patients under the added stress of not knowing for sure if they are infected or not. Universal precautions are always employed, but additional extensive personal protective device measures must be implemented as well. Ubiquitous use of these devices (surgical masks, respirators, face shields, gowns) has created limited supply, and many of us are forced to reuse some or all of these protective measures. Some of us are still treating patients without the requisite personal protective devices necessary to care for them and to protect ourselves. The long hours and additive stressors of caring for patients at this time has certainly taken its toll on health care providers. We are not able to or we simply do not take the time to properly care for ourselves, as I have previously discussed. We must find time to exercise, eat well, rest, and care for our minds and bodies in order to avoid burnout.¹

The forced shutdown quarantine period of this pandemic caused significant disruption to surgical practice. Ironically, it also allowed time for reflection. There was not really free time but rather more time to focus on improvements in patient care for the future. Systems and procedures were developed to ensure personal safety and safety of our staff and patients as well. Many of us continued to see non-elective emergency patients to help them with pain, infection, or other

maladies. This proved to be a very valuable service to the patients and communities we serve by minimizing emergency room and hospital visits, thereby decreasing the barriers to those more in need and preserving valuable resources.

The American College of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons is dedicated to facilitating and promoting “Surgical Excellence through Education”. Significant changes to the world of education have taken place at all levels. It remains unclear how this will impact students at any given stage in their education. Professional training programs are already stressed to gain enough student/resident educational exposure in the existing time constraints. Guaranteeing competency for these trainees and ensuring public safety for the future is paramount. The College and its members were accustomed to having in-person educational events. We have had an online presence for a long time. Many COVID-19 restrictions have forced us to cancel all in-person courses. We swiftly adapted to live virtual courses and have significantly expanded our online educational offerings to meet the demand and provide our members with the information they need and deserve.

I continue to be honored and humbled to serve as the President of the American College of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons. It remains a privilege to address the members of our respective professions via this editorial. This year has been unlike any other for us. We have made significant sacrifices and the future remains unclear. Your patients are very fortunate for the care you provide them. Working together toward a common goal seems to be the best approach in addressing the impact of COVID-19. I extend my sincere wishes for your safety and the safety of your families. Our new normal will certainly arrive with inevitable change.

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oooo.2020.10.003>

REFERENCE

1. Rieck KL. The needs of the patient come first-but at what cost? *Oral Surg Oral Med Oral Pathol Oral Radiol.* 2019;128:565-566.