

Dr. Aaron Burry - We're In It Together – CDA COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Chiraz Guessaier Hello and welcome to CDA Oasis, I am Chiraz Guessaier. As we continue to closely monitor and follow the COVID-19 pandemic we at CDA have been supporting our provincial dental associations in their response to the needs of their members. Today I am joined by Dr. Burry, associate director of professional affairs at CDA as well as the lead staff on the COVID-19 pandemic, he is here to talk about how the CDA is organizing to deal with the pandemic impact and some of the activities that are happening with our elected officials and stakeholders. Aaron, it's good to see you and know that you're doing well. We have all been working from home for the past few days, so it's good to get in touch again, even if it's virtually.

Dr. Aaron Burry: No, absolutely. It's a whole different way of working, but it doesn't mean we're any less busy. One of the things that you touched on which I think is really critical for sort of in Canada versus elsewhere, you know one of the questions we've been getting a lot is how come we're not hearing directly from the CDA as much as we think we should be? We have a different structure in Canada. The American Dental Association, for example, goes directly to its members. In Canada we go through the provincial dental associations. So, rest assured, on a daily basis we're in contact with every one of the provincial dental associations who are then feeding information out to general dentists.

Dr. Aaron Burry: So, we want to make sure that they're looking at their local websites and they're having conversations. So, it's not that we're not engaged, we're heavily, heavily engaged around all of this and we are reaching out, as I mentioned, constantly. In terms of the organization, one of the things that we have established is a COVID Response Team for the whole country and at this point it's made up of some very key members from the CDA board, but also all of the executive directors right across the country. So that Response Team meets every Tuesday morning at this point or more often as required, at 11 o'clock, and they're essentially dividing things into three areas that they're really focused on. The first obviously are the immediate things with respect to the pandemic response. And the pandemic response includes a lot of things that dentists are facing, everybody's facing. And we're moving through that in terms of, you know, questions like, well, what about personal protection equipment? What about, what should we be doing as emergencies and so on? What are different provinces doing? That's one of that key groups and that's one that Benoit Soucy, my colleague, and myself are supporting and working with all of our provincial counterparts.

Dr. Aaron Burry: The second area which we're really spending a lot of time, and Joel Neal here is helping to facilitate the discussions across the country, is related to all of those business elements that have been disrupted and are being disrupted. So, looking at things like, you know, insurance, looking at elements like what about the relationships with the banks, and organizing all of that national outreach to

those big players. Coordinating that so that we're common message, but also how do we approach those major institutions to hopefully assist as we go forward with some of the challenges that are being faced out there. The third element, which is our other colleague, which is Kevin Desjardins and essentially the committee that looks at government relations, all the government relations aspects.

Dr. Aaron Burry: So, Kevin Desjardins and myself have been on a number of calls to ministers, to ministers offices and so on, at the federal level, to try and make sure that the voice of dentistry is also included in understanding what the business, if you'd like, or the impact on the services to Canadians, what does that look like? So, across many different ministries. All of this is moving at lightning speed on many days, were long days, there's a lot of conversations that are happening. And certainly, part of Kevin's work is also looking at what coalitions do we build? That's often been a success at the national level. It's not just good enough in this day and age that it's just one voice, but it's when they hear it across multiple voice: pharmacists, physiotherapists, the occupational therapists. When they hear across a large coalition of healthcare providers then the issues become much more real for government. So those are sort of the three big buckets.

Dr. Aaron Burry: The next thing is to understand where we are and what's sort of happening. In any sort of emergency or urgency, and particularly a pandemic, pandemics are you're able to see them coming – and we've known that this is coming – so what you see in pandemic response is sort of four phases and where you are typically is in the preparation phase. In Canada, a lot is still preparing for a potential pandemic or epidemic, in Canada's case, when it arrives. We're still not in the full-blown epidemic at this point. We're very much in the preparation stage. What you see as part of the mitigation in the early forms of this. Where on the public health side is, you're seeing things like social isolation being recommended. You're seeing increased travel screening, all the measures you've seen in that.

Dr. Aaron Burry: That's what that's all related to is beginning to mitigate the potential to make the actual event less damaging, if you'd like, to Canadian economy and/or to the health of Canadians. Those two things. It's really about the health of Canadians and it's also about what happens in terms of our economy right now in pandemics. Another key element of that which you begin to see our governance declaring states of emergency. That's still at the preparation stage. What they're doing is the event hasn't happened, but they move into emergency or that declaration of emergency, so they have access to do things faster. They're not going to go through the typical bureaucratic and/or parliamentary type of ways that they usually do. It gives governments flexibility to order and to bring things to bear much more quickly. So, you're seeing states of emergency being declared now at the provincial and the municipal level. When you're actually in a pandemic, that's when you're in the response phase, and that's what they are

currently trying to avoid or trying to limit the impact or have that response being what they call flattening the curve.

Dr. Aaron Burry: In other words, having this go on longer but not as severe so that not as many people lose their lives. And at this particular point that's why they're really pushing social isolation, why they're shutting down things is they really don't want the event of what we've seen in Italy and other countries where, you know, the death rates currently in Italy are about 200 times where they are here in Canada, related to COVID. So, it's just keeping that in perspective. The last phase is after you've actually had the event and presumably in all pandemics at some point begin to burn themselves out because you get a certain degree of herd immunity and so on is your then look at trying to recover all of the normal activities and the normal services. And so we're in this game for some period of time if you'd like, and it's not really a game, that's an inappropriate term, but it's more we're in this response for quite a period of time as you go through those phases.

Dr. Aaron Burry: So that's also I think what's very confusing for Canadian dentists is, where are we? If you look on the internet and say, well how come Ontario is doing this and we're not doing that? Because each of their municipal governments, each of their provincial governments, and each of the overall responses are at different levels at this particular point in time. And it's sometimes a matter of two or three days or a week before that province, that area, reaches that same level.

Chiraz Guessaier That is a very helpful description Aaron and I have to admit when you explained it the first time when we were meeting, it made absolute sense and it makes things actually clearer to understand what's happening at different levels. And it is the same, I mean CDA and the PDA, the provincial dental associations are going through the same process of reviewing where we are and what is everyone doing? So, it made it really, really clear.

Dr. Aaron Burry: And it also really helps you to understand when you see things in the news media, when you are reading about why governments are doing something, this is all out of a standard playbook which is practiced over and over and over at the provincial, federal, and municipal levels these days. This is part of the routine training. It's part of, if you'd like it's the DNA of those organizations. And so I'm watching the playbooks and seeing the various things come out and then that's what we're trying to take back to the table so that our executive directors, our directors, all of the people in organized dentistry understand where is this...? What's the path we're on and what can we expect next week, the following week, and to try to get ahead of some of the things that are happening, as much as possible. I mean, this is, this is one of the most fluid situations. I've been doing a lot of these types of events for 25 years, never seen anything which has had such a big preparation for such a response that is potentially, you know, quite nasty if it doesn't go the right way.

Chiraz Guessaier Yeah. It's uncharted territories for everybody, for sure.

Dr. Aaron Burry: Exactly.

Chiraz Guessaier So, we're trying to make these conversations regular conversation and I know that we're coming back to talk again. Can you give our audience just a brief, brief, overview about what we're going to be talking about next?

Dr. Aaron Burry: Well, I think what we're going to be talking about next, what we're walking our way through is how is this changing? So for the last week we've been having a lot of conversations right across the country about essentially preparing for the ability to deliver emergency dentistry in an environment where we now have a virus that we know is fairly easily transmitted, that it stays active a lot longer than they thought and that is transmitted on hands and smooth surfaces and so on. So this changes the, you know, in terms of the whole social distancing and so on, in terms of how you do dentistry and what precautions will need to be in place until there's a solution for the virus, which a solution is either a medication and/or preferably a vaccine that helps to diminish its impact. That is one of the biggest things for me in terms of seeing the difference between H1N1 and the meningococcal outbreaks of the past decades, which were there was a vaccine available. So, the emphasis was on vaccinating as many people as quickly as possible. We don't have that intervention. So, I think it's going to be sharing what we learn over the next while. But the biggest piece is going to be moving into the next phase, which is we are going to be providing emergency dentistry and then were having discussions about what does it look like as we start to build back into practice resuming.

Chiraz Guessaier Perfect. Aaron, it was good to see you. I look forward to doing our next conversation. In the meantime, take care as they say my friend.

Dr. Aaron Burry: Likewise.