

Dr. Aaron Burry - Dental Care During and After the Pandemic

Chiraz Guessaier: Hello and welcome to CDA Oasis, I am Chiraz Guessaier. Today I welcome Dr. Aaron Burry, associate director of professional affairs at CDA. Aaron joins me to speak about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the future of dental clinical practice. How dentistry will look like once the lockdown is lifted may be very different for the dentists, the dental team, and the patient. In a nutshell, we're trying to imagine how the new world will look like. Aaron, good to see you again. Welcome to CDA Oasis.

Dr. Aaron Burry: Hi. Good afternoon, Chiraz. How are you?

Chiraz Guessaier...: I am very well, thank you. So, if I may ask you, in your opinion, and you're also a public dental health specialist, how has the pandemic impacted dentistry so far? I mean, we know about the closures. We know about the fact that dentists are only treating urgent care and emergencies. That's what's on the surface. What lies beneath that?

Dr. Aaron Burry: So, I think the biggest thing that lies beneath this is the notion that we have a disease entity called, you know, COVID which is transmitted through, in addition to droplets there's some concern that it's also easily aerosolized and easily transmissible by that way. In other words, its in the air. And this particularly what they're seeing from a public health perspective is that dentists, hygienists, anesthesiologist, people who work a lot with patients with anything to do with the airway are at greater risk of becoming infected or picking up the virus. So this is the reason for the movement or move that we're seeing in terms of the protocols. And the protocols changing that involve wearing visors, N95s, head coverings and so on is based, at least in the midterm, until they understand better what this is all about. That because dentists and hygienists are at risk, that you're wearing this additional protective equipment and particularly there are things like an N95 mask. That's what this is all based on.

Dr. Aaron Burry: This, to my mind, and I'm just going to talk more from a personal experience with this from, you know, yesterday, having done three patients in an emergency situation over about five hours. This has dramatically changed how practice currently operates. So, in at least in the short to medium term it has really very much depersonalize the whole experience. And I'm finding that, you know, I'm finding that difficult. I'll be quite honest about it. In terms of, normally you have a chance to talk with patients. Particularly in our case where we're dealing with patients with a lot of psychological issues, they have extreme phobias, they're often medical[ly] compromised and so on.

Dr. Aaron Burry: Normally we would do this in a very sort of gentle integration way. You kind of meet with the patient, they may talk like you and I are talking now. I would probably then, you know, put on a mask, put on my gloves, put on my glasses and then perhaps start my anesthetic. Then when I'm finished with that, with a

lot of nurturing and support, then potentially get into putting my visor and other things on. Now when you're bringing a patient to emergency, and particularly given that we don't know whether they're COVID positive or not, and we're treating with our sort of full protocol, you're going in with what I refer to as the full battle gear and it really depersonalized the experience. When you're under an N95 mask and you're doing things, one of the common things that you can't do is have a really clear conversation and it's hard to provide the kind of, you know, sort of verbal support, which you normally do to say to a patient, Oh, it's okay, I'm halfway done.

Dr. Aaron Burry: I'm only going to be a couple of more minutes. They can't really hear what you're saying or don't hear it clearly. And it's just the whole thing. Like we, in our particular environment where I've been practicing are very high touch environment. We provide a lot of physical support so we can help keep people who can't be sedated and can't take other kinds of medications to help them get through, which for them can be a very challenging dental experience. So, from my end of it, I see this as really taking away one of the greatest things, you know, you spend a lot of time building up the skills and enjoying that part of an interaction with patients and helping them through in that sort of sense that I really did a good job. Whereas, you know, today I sort of feel like I did the job, but I didn't make the connection and wasn't able to provide the caring part thing. That's really important to, or what's been really important to me of being a dentist now for a long time.

Chiraz Guessaier: So, what do you think dentists should do? Do we need to start talking to patients about these things and preparing them?

Dr. Aaron Burry: Well, one of the things, and I thought it was an excellent comment that was made in terms of we really need to start preparing patients for the fact when they come to see us right now, it's going to be a different experience. It's not going to be the experience that they're used to. And that struck me in terms of, yeah, I'm making sure now when we're doing our telephone calls that we walk through people what the experience is going to be like. And it won't be, you know, as a patient said to me yesterday who has a lot of extreme anxieties and phobias and that sort of thing, we had seen her previously on an emergency, now we had to see her a month later to do a couple of additional extractions and she said to me, this was 10 times worse than the last time. Even though it was no different, but we did not, we're not able to, I think establish the same kind of relationship when you're dressed in, you know, battle gear and when your assistant can't necessarily take her gloves off and hold someone's hand for a few minutes while you're just doing something to, you know, just get through that next step of what you're trying to do. So, that really struck me. That struck me as a comment from a patient who I had seen previously in emergency, was seeing them again for another series of problems. And you know, this, that changes the scope. So I think in at least in the short term until we can establish

some way where not every patient is being seen, you know, under the current precautions, is going to be a big shift for us and a point that I'm hoping we're going to get back to sooner rather than later.

Chiraz Guessaier: Yeah. I'm also thinking about kids.

Dr. Aaron Burry: Well, and this is the whole thing, like I have in our practice a lot of autistic kids and kids with special needs and [inaudible] thing. We have always had to take tremendous care to, you know, just as a general, in a general practice but that tends to attract a lot of kids from the community who don't have a lot of options that, you know, we spend a lot of time making sure that we made it a good experience. And one of the things that children don't respond very well to is all the hospital gear, typically. You know, that reminds them of perhaps some other less than pleasant experiences that they have and we've been trying to not create that image. So, it's, it will take some time I think to figure out how we would again engage with children if we had to potentially continue treatment in this way.

Chiraz Guessaier: Definitely. I mean, communication is the basis of any treatment in dentistry and alleviating the fear and anxiety that patients go through every time. I mean, it doesn't even have to be an emergency. Even coming for routine appointments sometimes it causes some people to be anxious so, you're absolutely right. There needs to be that conversation and there needs to be that educational piece. Now, any other considerations, Aaron, talking about dental practice in the future?

Dr. Aaron Burry: In terms of the future, I think the, at least in the medium to long-term until that we have some sense of [inaudible] pandemic, and all pandemics end at some point, until the point where there's a security that the viruses, these viruses are not as easily transmissible. I think we're into this kind of environment. I think innovation will come out of that environment and we will find different ways to be able to address this. And so, there's a short term crunch that makes it feel really, I think, oppressive in a lot of ways. And over time, like with everything else, innovation tends to come out of this, and they find new ways to be able to address the whole notions of infection control and how to build better products and potentially better ways to do things. So that's my, not just my hope, but I'm pretty sure that that's going to happen. In addition, and I know through Oasis and other things is that, you know, we've got a tremendous resource of great people in Canada, great dentists that we talk to and we'll be bringing more of those interviews I'm sure forward where we talk about, you know, how to better manage in this kind of environment. What are other people's experiences with it? And using this sort of platform and these discussions to share that.

Dr. Aaron Burry: So, it's a, that's one of the things we're always looking for when we're having these conversations or dentists email us about things that are going on is to try

and get this out there and share it. So, I do believe that there will be a lot of innovations and a lot of suggestions and you know, we are going to get through this and we're going to come out the other side. It will look different I think than it does today for the reasons that we've cited. But there's lots of optimism and you know, we're already seeing a lot of innovation in terms of technology coming out as a result.

Chiraz Guessaier: All right. I want to end it on that hopeful note. Thank you, Aaron, as usual. And I would encourage our viewers to send us their comments, suggestions, and questions if they have any. We will be happy to try and respond to those. Thank you again, Aaron. Take care and stay safe.

Dr. Aaron Burry: Thanks, Chiraz