

Dr. Aaron Burry – COVID-19: How Important is Point-of-Care Testing?

Chiraz Guessaier: Hello and welcome to CDA Oasis, I'm Chiraz Guessaier. I am joined by Dr. Aaron Burry, associate director of professional affairs at CDA, and we are talking about COVID-19 testing and tests and testing kits. Aaron, good to see you again. Welcome to CDA Oasis.

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

Chiraz Guessaier: I'm very well, thank you. So, the belief that this pandemic will end only when we find a vaccine or cure pushed pharmaceutical companies, labs and even university research teams into a frantic search for the treasure drug. Can you tell us where we are today?

Dr. Aaron Burry: So, let's first of all just clarify a couple of things. One of the things that we're really talking about are not the typical tests that you see in labs. So, that we see reported in the news media. Those tests are part of our medical care system. They're done both in hospital, large hospital labs as well as, you know, regional labs and private commercial labs. And they're doing a lot of testing to determine who actually has COVID and who's positive for the virus. What the other things that you're reading about a lot in the newspapers and seeing in coming online are what I call point of care tests. And these are tests which are increasingly available. They rely on a technology and what this is designed for is to allow a practitioner or in this case a medical clinic to be able to do a test and determine does someone actually have the particular virus that we're looking for or do they have the antibodies to the virus that we're looking for.

Dr. Aaron Burry: So, they're are point of care tests and that's what we're talking about here. Some of these things, and this is where we've been, and we here at CDA we get a lot of questions about this and that's why we've been following it and trying to get as much information as we possibly can because obviously there's a lot of interest in if we had a point of care test, this would really help determine who potentially has the virus and who doesn't and therefore would potentially be an indication of when we needed to take full precautions and when we could potentially use our normal standard or precautions. So, I think that's why there's a lot of interest in this particular test. So, there are two companies right now that have their product. One is in the marketplace, it's out of the United States called Abbott. In all cases, none of these tests are at a full market potential.

Dr. Aaron Burry: In other words, they have FDA approval or interim approval. So, they're going to [inaudible] two things. One is, they're doing a verification that the test that they are promoting actually works. So these tests are all based on existing equipment that the manufacturers have largely repurposed to retest for COVID. So, they're not a brand-new technology. They're technologies that have been around, but they're being repurposed for this specific test. They all come with their own

specific equipment that the company sell. And then in addition, they come with a certain number of tests. Where we are as of today is last week a company by the name of Abbott actually released their first test to the city of Detroit where they have a tremendous need to do testing. There [were] 5000 tests that were released. To give you an idea of what those 5,000 tests cost, they cost approximately a hundred dollars Canadian per test at this particular point to deliver.

Dr. Aaron Burry: Now in Canada, there's another technology and the federal government and provincial governments, they move to secure this technology. It's actually manufactured here in Ottawa by a company by the name of Spartan. This is basically a mini lab in a box. And though that particular product, right now, costs around per box, about \$38,000 for 400 tests. So, about \$38,000 for about 400 tests. That's quite a bit and that's a significant investment. And so that's what's currently in the marketplace. And if you look at 400 tests for the typical dentist, say even if they needed to test 1,000 patients a year that's somewhere close to \$90,000 to \$100,000 just in testing costs for a year. So, these are typically the types of tests that you want to use sparingly and where there are high risk situations and that's what the government is typically investing in.

Dr. Aaron Burry: So, if you have a patient that you're considering bringing into hospital, for example, that's often where these point of care tests are really critical. Or if you're going to send someone back to a long-term care home where it's generally better to spend \$100 on determining whether they're potentially carrying COVID now after a period in hospital and rather than them having infect an entire long-term care home.

Chiraz Guessaier: So, Aaron, how does that compare to what's happening in the lab and what the provinces are trying to do with these tests?

Dr. Aaron Burry: So, just to give you some context of where this might fit, in the province of Ontario right now they are trying to get up to approximately 13,000 tests a day. So, if you look at these particular products, if you look at what the province of Quebec for example has purchased, which is about \$9.5 million worth of tests and equipment, there you're talking about 100,000 tests. So, 100,000 tests is basically a, you know, if you try to compare the two, would be less than a one month supply. So, these tests are not going to replace what's done in laboratory, laboratory takes longer, but they're only used in places where you have point of care where typically you've got an urgent question that you need to answer. And this is why it becomes so important to have this. So, this is a more expensive way to deliver the testing, but it's faster.

Chiraz Guessaier: So, in practical terms, do you think that this has a place in dentistry? Could dentistry potentially introduce a test like this in the future?

- Dr. Aaron Burry: One of the things that I think is, you know, certainly in terms of, if you can imagine, and with them releasing say 100,000 tests in the whole province of Quebec, you can see that in the short term there will not be a lot of tests available for purchase for other types of things. But I think that will change. The other thing that I think will also change but not in the short term, whenever you're in the middle of a pandemic and in a shortage, costs tend to be high. And we're looking at products that are being developed very, very quickly. But I do believe that, you know, like with everything else in business that these types of things will become more economical, but not within say the first year or two, and will become more economical as more companies build/bring products online.
- Chiraz Guessaier: Perfect. Aaron, thank you very much. As usual, you come as soon as we call on you. We really appreciate it.
- Dr. Aaron Burry: Well, we hope that this information is really helpful. We're getting a lot of questions. So, I'm hoping that that kind of clarification about what it is in terms of costs and particularly what we're talking about and how quickly that might be available. You know, those are really important questions and that's why we're spending so much time talking to the government, talking with various companies – if we can get in touch with them these days –, as well as getting some sense of costing because I mean, that's important for dentists to understand.
- Chiraz Guessaier: Yeah. And you reminded me to remind our viewers if they have any additional questions, please feel free to let us know and we will try and get you the answers to those. Again, Aaron, thank you very much. Take care and stay safe.
- Dr. Aaron Burry: You too. Talk soon.