

Progression of Dentistry after COVID-19

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During the COVID-19 pandemic many changes and adaptations were forced onto the profession. This was most clearly demonstrated in the development and implementation of new educational approaches and pedagogies to ensure ongoing clinical competency training. Many dental students had to adapt rapidly to online teaching and learning environments, to a spectrum of innovative assessment methods, and to limited engagement in a clinical setting. This went together with revised clinical competency training methods and interventions to compensate for lost clinical time. The question that remains is whether these changes will remain in place after the pandemic, because practitioners qualifying during the pandemic are ultimately certified as clinically competent; or whether this innovative approach still requires further scrutiny and validation.

The advancement in educational techniques and philosophies is paralleled by technological development and a steady evolution of the modern dental practice. We are seeing higher demands from patients to deliver suitable interventions in shorter times. There is also a rapid development in dental materials sciences which is in part fueled through commercialization. Ultimately the dental practice is a business that needs to protect profits to remain viable and to deliver services. To achieve this, many have to adapt to the general direction that dentistry is going in today or face more demanding challenges. Ultimately if the practitioner's hands are idle, there is no income, and many practices already paid a heavy price during the lockdown phases of the pandemic.

The modern dental practice needs to remain competitive and relevant in the fast-evolving dental profession. One of the main challenges faced by many colleagues is how to stand out and distinguish their own clinic in the market. Practices are continually faced with attracting and retaining patients, difficult decisions such as equipment investment, implementing new treatments and procedures, delivering on continuing professional development requirements and updating clinical skills. Many have reworked patient workflows and implemented teledentistry or teledental components into their daily practice as a direct answer to the COVID-19 restrictions. These newly adopted approaches and innovations to remain competitive have opened up a new discussion about reimbursement for these services rendered, limitations in scope, and appropriate skill development, and many of these novel developments still need to be tested and validated.

Dental education must be continually reworked to incorporate the latest picture of the modern dental practice in the country in conjunction with the needs of



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all the people. These aspirant practitioners need to be ready and competent to step into their new role with the least amount of disruption. Post-qualification development and delivery of training that is not affiliated to a particular dental school is playing an increasingly important role in the educational setting for practicing clinicians. With the rapid development of communications and information technology platforms, the acquisition and integration of knowledge by those willing to learn has become very easy. Regulatory and statutory bodies therefore run the risk of falling behind in the evolution of different scopes of practice and modernization of the profession, and they must be proactive to participate and facilitate the adaptation of dentistry's development. We may even find the need for implementation of new fields of specialization is much closer than anticipated.

Modern dentistry will determine its own path, and this is an exciting journey to be on.