



Positive Impact of COVID-19 on Dental Academia

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Editorial

Disruptive outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic evoked many challenges for the academicians and healthcare professionals. These challenges affected the dental academia and quality standards of education. The devastating effects included sudden shut downs of pre-clinics and clinics, inaccessible on-campus learning experiences for the students, sudden change in modes of teaching and lack of patient care learning access. As far as institutes are concerned, they faced financial shortfalls, interrupted research activities, delay or cancellation of scientific conferences, seminars and related ceremonies and drastic changes in the hiring policies for academicians and researchers. The psychological impact on staff and the student's due to fear of uncertainties is the major setback since past year.

This column will address the positive impact of COVID-19 on dental academia including teaching methodologies, research and dental education.

Despite extended sphere of disruption and damage, academicians managed the crisis with effective coping regime. They reviewed the policies in lights of the lessons learned from past experiences, and adapt to the current challenges, for the well-being of profession.

Faculties shifted suddenly to virtual/online mode of teaching as per recommendations of American Association of Dental Education (ADEA). The global Shifting to the virtual mode provided the opportunities to adapt modern approaches of teaching *via* digital applications. Virtual mode shifting led to the development of specialized communication lines, virtual hubs and technological forums, to channelize the inter-connections between students and the faculty. These measures made remote operations convenient. Dental education requires huge participation on part of mentors. The pandemic paved the ways to many innovative strategies for the uninterrupted academic year. Both undergraduate dental schools and postgraduate training centers adapted alternative modes of teaching and assessments. They included virtual presentations, submission of online progress reports, multimedia workshops, problem-based learning, webinars and virtual quizzes.

Faculties and institutions also developed specific crisis-related policies to stabilize mental health and sense of loneliness. Various institutes approved grants and contingency funds to continue academic activities without interruptions. The COVID-19 outbreak led us to the realization that, e-learning virtual oral health education and tele dentistry have been underestimated in past years.

The era of COVID-19 outbreak exhibited the strategic planning and leadership abilities of many institutions and universities globally. There was a drastic rise, seen in collaboration amongst the universities, research institutes and academicians. The drive to adapt evidence-based practice and scientific approach were the key reasons behind these adaptations. Although COVID-19 outbreak was soul stirring, but it had a positive impact on research and scientific collaborations. These inter-connections were mandatory for the solidarity of the profession. They assisted in scientific progression and evolution of dentistry. Internet is a powerful source of access to millions of people globally, in a fraction of second. These collaborations not only provoked business drive, but they utilized internet as an educational engine at its best. Distant learning reduced the cost of contingency, service and maintenance, which was otherwise necessary.

Since the lab based and no essential research activities were suspended in lock down, consequently, researchers focused on online research-based surveys, conducting reviews specifically in relation to COVID-19. Which was definitely a new trend in following. Furthermore, many continuing dental education programs were introduced to improve the professional growth of dental professionals, academicians and researchers. These on-screen integrated programs ensured these safety and well-being of professional growth.

Dental fraternity is not only related with research and academia, but, to operational health care centers and hospitals. The smooth running of dental hospitals with high infrastructures and strategic

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planning provokes a business drive. Their contribution to primary healthcare can never be denied. They not only provide the healthcare facility, but they also contribute to the economy by provision of jobs to dentists, assistants, technicians and supporting staff. Dental personnel have salient role in raising awareness and combating pandemics masks, gloves and protective wear are not a “New normal” in dentistry. As the dentists are anxious or scared of getting infected, they are fully aware of the significance of protection. Therefore, many hospitals involved their dental personnel as frontline workers to combat COVID-19 pandemic. This involvement has revolutionized the role of dental fraternity as primary care providers.

Unfortunately, in past years, dentistry has never been on the top of priority lists of governments and funding bodies. The financial and insurance coverage has never been offered for the discipline of dentistry. This ignorance has left a void, when it comes

to reorganization of dental care services and effective educational activities. The involvement of dental personnel in the frontline workers in pandemic raised a question mark on the part of negligence by the concerned authorities. This pandemic may lead to the reorganization of role of dentistry in primary health care. It has evoked the concern, that foundation of dental education must be based on inter-professional training. The underestimated oral health care needs focus and attention now.

The pandemic is hurting, but its positive impact, on innovation in e-learning, interconnections between the institutions, economic and business drive in industry and drastic realization about the capabilities of dentists in promoting, society’s well-being is lasting. This transition may determine the footsteps to be followed for the training of future dentists.