

SOME RANDOM REFLECTIONS ON COVID-19

In these days, we, especially as dentists and sometimes even as patients, are all affected by this pandemic, the largest after the Spanish flu (1918-20), the deadliest pandemic in history in absolute numbers. Allow me to make a few random reflections on the subject.

Personal level: *memento mori* (from the Latin “remember that you must die”), a clear reminder of the inevitability of death. I found out that my nice neighbour sadly died in an intensive care unit for COVID-19 sufferers. We had lived on the same floor, separated only a thin brick wall, which allowed us to hear each other. There was no funeral or death notice, so almost nobody in the same building knew. The fact is that death will inevitably come, we just do not know when. So, live accordingly, ‘carpe diem’, respecting others.

Geopolitical level: *be prepared*. This pandemic seems not to affect all countries in the same way, or, rather, not all countries have confronted this pandemic in the same way. Although we cannot predict when they will come, pandemics have always occurred and will always occur. Therefore, we should have been better prepared to deal with this one. Prevention is the first weapon against disease. Too many countries were taken by total surprise, despite the fact that other countries were already tackling the same issue. There are no excuses for such a lack of readiness. We should learn from our errors and be prepared for the next one, which will arrive sooner or later.

Scientific level: *be critical*. This is not easy especially when a group of eminent scientists, including Nobel prize winners for medicine, support the theory that the virus was made in the laboratory, while others say that it occurred naturally. I do not have sufficient knowledge about genetic engineering to critically evaluate this matter, but I am literally terrified by this discussion. I take no side, since both arguments seem logical, but I cannot believe that such a discussion is going on. I am sure that those who need to know, do know, but somebody is lying, and this is not what is needed in such a delicate situation. If they are not lying, it means that somebody is incompetent, and between liars and incompetents the choice is a difficult one. When we hear doctors suggesting the administration of totally different drugs, and reporting on success based on their first two treated patients, I realise that the sense of inferiority that dentists may have toward the medical profession may not be totally justified. I, was offered a serological test to screen for immunoglobulin M and G to discriminate who has had contact with COVID-19. I enquired about its sensitivity and specificity. I was provided with an Chinese article and, after reading it, I wondered which “scientific” journal could have considered publishing a paper without even the tiniest mention of the population used to evaluate the test. What sense does it make to use a diagnostic test if its validity is unclear?

Conspiracy theory level: *be critical*. This topic is more dangerous than quicksand. I will limit myself to the most cited example in social media. It has been widely reported that Bill Gates had artificially created this virus for the purposes of selling vaccines, which, however, are nowhere to be found. This fake news originated from a speech that the founder of Microsoft gave in 2015 in which he forecast a pandemic that could kill billions of people. Bill Gates is a visionary in the good sense of the term. Visionaries have open and critical brains that allow them to have a more global vision on how to deal with possible negative events or the future in general.

Dental level: *be prepared*. Like it or not, we are the professionals most likely to be infected and transmit this disease. We cannot simply ignore it, pretending that in the short-term everything will be the same. We are going to have to treat our patients dressed more like astronauts than medical practitioners. As soon as sufficient personal protection devices become available, the profession will start up again, but everything will be more time-consuming, stressful, costly and less pleasant. This is inevitable until this virus has finally been defeated. So, please use your time to prepare and organise yourself and your workplace, with no compromises, as nobody can compromise with death.

Unfortunately, there is no study on COVID-19 in this issue, but I can assure you that we tried to conduct a diagnostic study to validate a qualitative serologic test. Once more, a lack of resources and trust from the industry did not help. My final reflection is that selling may be important, but is fundamental to be sure that what is being sold to people could actually bring about benefits and no harm (*primum non nocere*). Having said this, we are back to the original scope of this journal: knowing the truth remains the key issue.

Happy reading,
Marco