

AWAITING THE SECOND WAVE

At this moment, all over the world we are living in uncertainty.

The two main questions we are asking are will the second wave of COVID-19 arrive? And what will its consequences be?

The answer to the first question is quite simple, at least in western Europe; we are already confronting the second wave, or at least its beginning. It may reach countries with several weeks' difference, but it is here already. Many other countries are still dealing with the first wave, but the distinction between the two is more of an academic discussion since the consequences of both are more or less the same. Only time will reveal the practical implications.

The second question is more difficult to answer. What will the consequences of a second COVID wave be? Let us be honest, nobody knows, since predicting the future is simply guesswork. However, that simple fact has not stopped us dividing ourselves into different "factions", based on our personalities – the catastrophists (pessimists), the realists (fatalists), and the optimists (negationists).

The catastrophist group comprises a variety of individuals, including but not limited to hypochondriacs, chronic pessimists and the depressed, not to mention the attention-seekers in the media, the official press, and many politicians with an uncertain future, etc. Either they really believe that the second wave could cause more devastating consequences than the first wave – with more people in intensive care, more deaths, and inevitable lockdowns – or it is convenient for them to persuade the majority of people to believe so.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, we have the negationists, who include chronic optimists, business owners (restaurants, hotels, discos, etc.), anti-vax movements, the independent media, and the political opposition, etc. They hold the opposite view, touting the idea that COVID is less dangerous than the common flu, that it has attenuated over time, and similar concepts.

In the middle there are the realists. They do not really have a definitive idea, since they continuously adjust their views after critical interpretation of the information that becomes available. They consider the matter potentially dangerous, but possible to control with adequate measures and behaviours. They try to weigh the actual risks with the possible benefits of each decision in terms of health, the economy and personal freedoms. This is a very complicated matter, but we need to be critical and able to interpret the news we receive from the press. For instance, 5000 new people with positive COVID test results does not mean 5000 sick people; maybe fewer than 500 of these people will develop symptoms, and fewer than 50 will need hospital treatment, with only 5 being referred to intensive care. This is by no means good, but neither is it devastating. We are not facing the Spanish flu, which killed over 50 million people, many of them youngsters, at the end of the First World War. Moreover, COVID-19 is not a plague that could kill up to 70% of the people that it infects, so the situation, though serious, is actually not as dramatic as it is being portrayed in some quarters.

As dentists, we need to adopt responsible behaviour, considering the potential risks, but we should not stop all our activities. Each regulatory body has provided recommendations for dentists. These may be quite different from country to country, and will inevitably impact the way in which we work and live, but we must bear in mind that this is a transitory period, and with any luck within a year or so we shall have overcome this pandemic and gradually returned to our normal lives.

So, be patient, do not panic, take opportune measures, and keep your brains active. Also, since for the time being we have more time at our disposal, I believe we should invest some of our time in continuous education and learning. I, for one, will be taking this time to update, reflect and upgrade. Why not take this opportunity to read some scientific articles? Our brains will definitively benefit from it, and maybe also our profession.

All the best,
Marco