

Three must do actions to prepare for post-Covid19 dental world

By Dr John Hagliassis

“Necessity is the mother of invention. A need or problem encourages creative efforts to meet the need or solve the problem.” – Plato

For a whole year our team put in countless hours, sent countless emails and took part in countless meetings. We are preparing for ACAS2020, a major dental symposium (700+ attendees) on clear aligners and 15% of our delegates were coming from overseas. It was held this February, on 21st and 22nd. For many weeks our team fielded numerous enquiries from international and interstate guests as to whether Sydney and Australia, was safe given the devastating bushfires that ravaged the country over summer.

We were in close contact with local authorities who confirmed all was safe to proceed but to expect smog and reduced air-quality. We had also heard about a virus in the world news but there was not much information on it. We enquired about this also and were told all was safe to proceed. A week before the event, one of our keynote speakers from Hong Kong emailed to advise that she could not attend. Similarly, delegates from China or transiting through China contacted us also to advise the same thing. Overnight, we lost 15% of our delegates.

The event went ahead and was a major success. Sydney was booming, the weather fantastic and many generous donations to the bushfire appeal meant there was light at the end of the tunnel. But the next four weeks saw a dramatic and rapid escalation of events. The virus was no longer overseas, it was here, now, and if life was a domino, one by one the pieces tumbled and our life as we know it started to rapidly disappear.

Things happened that we could never have even imagined. First it was unbelievable, but then it was true. Our generation had not seen anything like this and I dare say that given our technology, knowledge and connectedness, we as a world, got cocky that we were invincible of such disruptions. But, clearly, we weren't.

As time goes on, we know it will get

better. It must get better. But when it does, there will be people left behind. There is a common saying that you don't have to walk backward to fall behind.

“Necessity is the mother of invention” and this post COVID-19 era will facilitate a massive reset. It will foster innovation and invention not only in Australia, but world-wide. This catastrophic pandemic event will produce opportunities and hardships but the one constant will be the necessity for change.

As we have painfully found out during lockdown, if we have no patients, we can't do dentistry. And hence, our innovation should not only be focused on dentistry, but more importantly how we service our patients.

We must fundamentally change our mindset from a reactionary health care service provider to be a proactive knowledge and service providers.

This means we need to reinvent and innovate how we perceive ourselves and what we do.

But at the forefront of all thoughts is: what do our patients want?

The answer is the same whether dental, medical, holiday, buying a car... they want affordable, convenient, transparent and accountable services- and don't forget pain free.

They want whiter, straighter smiles and they want them for life!

And the exciting news is we already have the answer: technology.

It is everywhere and easily accessible for us and our patients to engage and facilitate what the patient wants. We can do virtual consults, virtual treatment monitoring via apps, photos and videos. We can deliver self administering appliances like clear aligners (all of which was made obvious with level 3 COVID19 restrictions).

The likes of intra oral scanners, digital photography, radiology and then AI implementation will accelerate and reinvent how we collate, interpret,



assist or complete diagnosis, treatment planning, and virtual simulation of this new untapped data. This will fast track our ability to enhance dentistry services by creating new pathways to communicate, execute and systemize dentistry from now on.

Like never before we have the ability to redefine services and predictability of services to our patients whether elective, treatment/prevention of disease and maintenance to suit their world.

I image the use of an app to monitor hygiene and whitening for patients and then redefine the old world approach of 6 monthly recalls to subscription base model where the app provided by us using AI, alerts the patients as to the best time to seek a checkup and clean or whitening refresh. This will all be done with collective data interpretation using technology at the patients' convenience.

However, there will be challenges in this post COVID19 world. Our ability to lead and redefine infection control standards and the adverse PR impact of when a patient contracts COVID19 within a dental practice will be instrumental in how we navigate this tricky period. Again our ability to utilize technology to ensure efficient systems and predictable standards in infection control will reduce the negative impact on new and costly workflows that will inevitably occur from this post COVID19 era.

The decision is yours. Either use this time to keep moving forward or watch as the rest of the profession leaves you behind. *