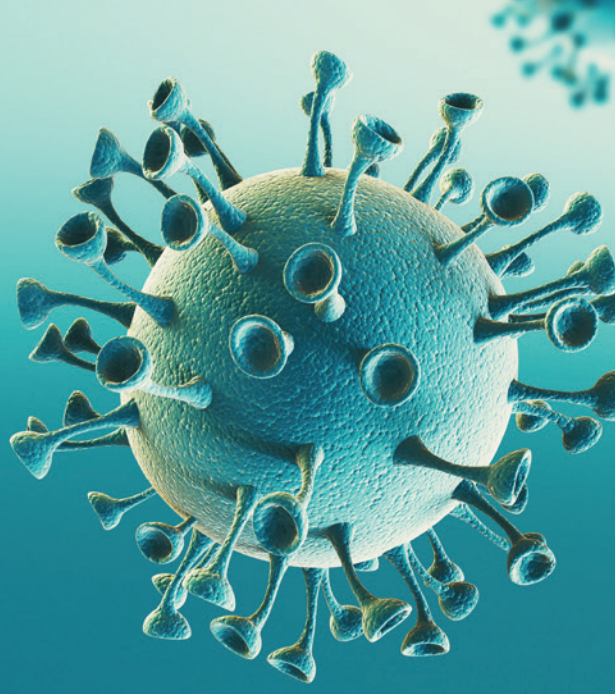


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Practice strategies in the age of corona

Dr Anna Maria Yiannikos, Germany & Cyprus

Dear friends and colleagues,

We have all been facing an extremely unknown and difficult situation these past few weeks and yes, it is completely normal to be afraid and feel worried about your clinic's future in the post-coronavirus era. I would like to begin with a quote from Nelson Mandela, who said: "When conditions change, you must change your strategy and your mind. That's not indecisiveness, that's pragmatism."

Some may accuse us of being naive, if we continue to believe that patients in the future will behave the same way they did before the COVID-19 crisis, especially during surgical procedures. We should accept this as a fact. The fear of becoming infected has increased significantly in the past few weeks and is expected to remain heightened for the time being. The need for social distancing measures will remain strong. Unnecessary visits to friends, family and others will mostly be avoided and people will become more health-conscious. Cleanliness and proper hygiene should be paramount these days. In the following I will provide you with 7 essential tips, which, I believe, contain the most important advice I ever gave in an article.

1. Increase electronic engagement

For one thing, set up your website and general online presence in a way that makes it easy for people to book appointments online. In addition, offer new patients to send them the required medical documents via e-mail, so they can fill it out at home before coming to an appointment. They can return these completed forms by e-mail as well, in order to reduce waiting times at the reception area of your practice. Moreover, offer patients a quick video meeting with you via Viber, WhatsApp, FaceTime or Messenger, where they can express their dental issues ahead of a physical consultation. This builds trust, since patients can get to know you before an actual physical appointment and they will be reassured that they will receive exactly the treatment they need with you as their dentist. Further procedures can then be carried out at your clinic. Remember: people need encouragement to take action and you will be there for them when they do!

2. Make sure that your patients feel protected

Owing to the current pandemic, patients are most likely to be more aware of diseases and, of course, you should continue to take the protective measures that you would normally take during dental procedures—these are ever more important during the COVID-19 period. In addition, you may consider providing additional protective gear like shoe shields for walking around the clinic for your patients. This will make them feel safe and protected during appointments and it shows that their safety is important to you.

3. Reassure patients that they can rely on you

Especially in times like these where most people avoid crowded places and try to live by the concept of social distancing, it is vital for you to reassure them that it won't come to any delays in your clinic. Make sure that you establish a system that both reduces waiting times and keeps physical contact between patients at a minimum. In these uncertain times, it is important to assure patients that they won't be running into other patients at your clinic and thus bearing the risk of becoming infected.

4. Show empathy and give comfort

Some people are likely to lose their jobs as a result of the current pandemic, or at least experience a decline in their income. Therefore, showing empathy is vital. Comfort your patients like a friend would do. Apart from that, avoid losing loyal patients only because they are not able to afford certain procedures anymore owing to the current situation. You can minimise this risk by offering patients to prioritise certain dental conditions over others. This should happen in written form, where you need to include the important note that this treatment plan is based on recent findings and will be in place for no more than three months. However, remind them (preferably also in written form) that their dental problems will be likely to deteriorate further over time.

5. Look at things from a patients point of view

Many of you are probably anxious about the likely decline in the number of the cosmetic cases that you would normally have treated in the near future. And yes, the truth is that some people probably will not have the budget for cosmetic surgeries in the months ahead. Many people will reduce their social presence and thus there will not be many opportunities for them to proudly show off treatment results and their new smiles to others. Patients will only accept treatment proposals and spend money on them, if they understand these treatments are beneficial to their health (human beings are conscious about their personal health, after all).

Hence, start to emphasise the strong link between the immune system and dental health when speaking to patients. Try to see the world from their point of view: how does it feel, after living for so many days in lockdown and self-isolation, to face the daily fear of getting infected and/or being socially discriminated, if you behave in a wrong way? Wouldn't you be relieved that your favourite dental clinic implements processes that are aimed at benefitting the health of patients? Furthermore, it is our moral duty to enhance our patient's health, as well as to communicate this approach to them—not only on a theoretical level, but also practically.

6. Think more digitally

I would argue that the more your clinic embraces means of digital dentistry, the more it will thrive! Why? These days, patients will prefer fewer visits to doctors in order to minimise the exposure to possible viral dangers and the risk of getting infected. Hence, digital means such as CAD/CAM systems, or intra-oral scanners and cameras, which imply fewer physical patient contact and a more forward-thinking attitude, should be added to your clinic's armamentarium in order to set your clinic apart and attract new patients even in times of a pandemic.

7. Demonstrate your new processes

Start demonstrating the newly developed processes and rules for your clinic or practice by communicating them to your patients: send newsletters to the patients in your database, produce and post short videos of you and your staff using and applying these new processes and opt for social media channels that have the widest possible reach.

Remember—life will go on!

My dear colleagues, make this "stay home" period a productive one, since there will now be plenty of time to make all the necessary changes to your clinic's workflows and processes. It is important to remember that life will go on after this crisis. However, you need to adapt to and prepare for the post-pandemic era. Be proactive and start designing your own new set of rules. Those who understand this concept are more likely to prosper eventually. In my next article, I will delve more deeply into the implications the current pandemic has for dentists and their clinics in the future. Until then, remember: this is your time to get ready and prepare for the things to come! For any further questions, information, requests and guidance feel free to reach out to dba@yiannikosdental.com.

about the author



Dr Anna Maria Yiannikos (DDS, LSO, M.Sc., MBA) is one of the first two women worldwide to have obtained a master's degree in laser dentistry. She has owned a dental clinic for 30 years now and leads the innovative Dental Business Administration Mastership Course at RWTH Aachen University in Germany. She is an adjunct faculty member of the Aachen Center for Laser Dentistry.

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