

The European view of the situation of dentistry

At a glimpse

What is the situation of dentists in the countries of the associated partner associations? In this format we publish in loose succession the reports from the countries. In this issue we start with the United Kingdom, Germany, The Netherlands, Serbia, Hungary, India and Macedonia.

United Kingdom

The governments in the UK have unhelpfully decided on different rules for dentists and their teams. The introduction of fallow time was conceived as a way of mitigating disease spread and this concept effectively made the throughput of dental patients so limited that practices wouldn't have survived without the government supporting them. The governments of the different countries agreed to pay a proportion of the normal NHS incomes for the practices to survive. There is now a backlog of patients and lots of treatments haven't been carried out and there doesn't seem to be a straightforward pathway back to access for patients.

Dentists are disillusioned and disappointed that oral healthcare still doesn't seem to be a priority for governments.

Due to many patients opting for private dentistry and deciding to invest in implant therapies there has been somewhat of a rise in these treatments.

This has been a good thing for the practices that provide care under this system.

There is ever more of a divide between the two systems with no sign of any change for the benefits of the majority any time soon.

As ever, the issue of subsidised care for patients is always fraught with challenges between getting value for money and adequately rewarding those on the frontline and at the moment there are no easy solutions.



Dr Eimear O'Connell
President ADI UK

Germany

German dentists are confronted with a new act concerning COVID-19 vaccination. As of March 15, 2022, the obligation to demonstrate immunity to COVID-19 has been in place in health and care facilities. Employers must have a proof of vaccination, proof of recovery or a medical certificate of a medical contraindication shown. With the changes in the Infection Protection Act, the provision of proof of immunity against COVID-19 in health and care facilities is a mandatory employment requirement. It does not depend on the type of employment. Unvaccinated employees in the health sector could now face consequences. The Government may impose fines, prohibitions on activities and entry. However, the implementation is handled by the federal states. In Bavaria, for example, the corona vaccination require-

ment for employees in nursing and health care is being implemented and enforced only slowly and gradually.

Overall, dentists in Germany also fear that unvaccinated practice employees will look for a new job for this reason.



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President BDIZ EDI

The Netherlands

In general, in The Netherlands almost all general Covid restrictions are released, except the advice to test when having symptoms and a minimum of five days self isolation when tested COVID positive.

For example all bars, restaurants, clubs and festivals are permitted, also without a negative test result or any form of 2G/3G. In the public transport also a face mask is not obligated anymore. The hospital numbers although still quite high (except IC) but are manageable and declining.

About the situation for the dentistry here: There is no questionnaire (triage) in advance for patients anymore except for the possibility of a (proven) COVID infection. Patients with (proven) COVID infection receive only emergency treatments, with full hygienic protocol (gowns, hat, FFP2). Otherwise it's the normal HIP protocol, surgical mask etc. Unfortunately,

since coxes transmission is still quite high, many healthcare workers are in quarantine causing a high number of absence (>5%). Also patients are missing their appointments more often than in the past, which has as effect a lower turnover than pre-COVID.



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Serbia

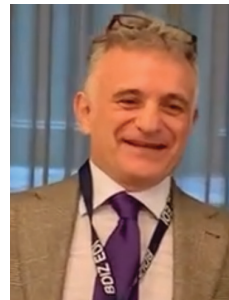
Taking into account the epidemiological situation, which has improved significantly, dentists in Serbia have entered the year 2022 relaxed in terms of the strict epidemic measures that have been in force since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Immunization against COVID-19 in Serbia is not an obligation, however, strict protection measures are still in force. If it can be said that something good came out of the COVID-19 epidemic, it is that dentists are now taking protection measures much more seriously.

Unlike the private practice in medicine, which simply thrived during the epidemic because state health institutions were mostly engaged in the treatment of the Corona, private dental practices were suppressed with a reduced influx of patients. This trend occurs mainly for two reasons. First, however, patients fear that they may be infected with the Coronavirus, and thus leave complex dental reconstructions for "better times." Also, not a small number of surgeries in Serbia provide dental services to patients living abroad, although they are mostly citizens of Serbia. It is well known what problems people encountered regarding travel during the COVID-19 epidemic.

Another global problem that affects the reduced number of patients has appeared in Serbia in the last month, and that is, of course, the war between Russia and Ukraine. Although life in Serbia is going on almost normally for now, without any restrictions or shortages, world crises such as Ukraine's are generally negatively affecting people who are worried about what will happen in the future. This, of course, is also repercussed on dental practices, because pa-

tients certainly do not prioritize dental services, except, of course, emergencies.

However, not everything is so upsetting. The Dental Chamber of Serbia, in co-organization with the School of Dental Medicine, University of Belgrade, is once again, seventh years in a row, organizing the 21st Serbian Dental Congress in Belgrade, October 6-9-2022, the largest event of its kind in the region. This year, the congress will be organized in a hybrid form, unlike last year, which was organized using the online web platform. We hope that the epidemic, as well as world situation, will allow the congress to be held live, et least, for the most part. Besides this Congress, the most important dental event in the region, various types of continuous medical education are also organized, to which dentists gladly respond, especially since they are held live again.



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Hungary

In Hungary all health care professionals needed to be vaccinated three times. (also students in the faculty), otherwise they are not allowed to work/study. Mask is obligatory in health-care institutions only, nowhere else.

The oral hygiene in general is much worse than before COVID, in many cases selfcare is totally missing (incl. oral selfcare) due to the fact, that mask was covering everything for a long time. More patients intend to go for extraction than before, and patient's turnover is much lower...

That is also reported by dental hygienists colleagues recently. We suspect a long term negative effect on oral health.



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India

Due to the significant decline in Coronavirus cases in India, the Ministry of Home Affairs has abolished all existing COVID restrictions from March 31st except for wearing face masks and maintaining social distancing. Nevertheless, it is also stated that the Disaster Management Act will no longer be invoked for COVID safety measures. Surprisingly, a few states have also declared that masks are not mandatory for the general public.

We as dentists are expecting both, the positive and negative impacts of this decision on dentistry. The good thing about this is that after the relaxation in the COVID norms there will be a free flow of the patients who no longer will be hesitant to approach the dentist for their dental issues in contrast to the COVID times when they were too afraid to approach the dentist. Eventually, this will motivate the demotivated dentists and regain their confidence in dentistry.

On the other hand, the threat of COVID-19 has not ended completely. Its novel variant is still prevalent in our neighbouring country China. If all of a sudden a new COVID-19 wave emerges then it will be very difficult to tackle the situation due to the

already discontinued COVID regulations. The end resort could be imposing a nation-wide lockdown which is the last thing that a dentist wants. It might hit us even harder. So, overall the decision of abolishing COVID norms has brought a lot of uncertainties in the field of dentistry. But, on a positive note, we are looking forward to live in a COVID free world.



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North Macedonia

The situation in North Macedonia related to dentistry is characterized by many points of interest, starting with education, which results in overproduction of general dentists, of which about 1/4 do not work in the dental health system or have left the country; on one hand we face an overproduction of dentists and specialists, on the other hand there is a decrease in number of dental nurses/assistants, for whom there are not even enough educational institutions. There are also shortcomings in several laws, primarily in the Law on Health Care, which refer to the dental activity with all its specialties, as well as laws in the field of education.

Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic: Due to the restrictive measures and special protocols imposed on dentists, for the safety and protection of both patients and staff in dental offices during the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of purchasing pro-

tective equipment and disinfectants in dental offices has increased. The dentists were not affected by any anti-crisis measures adopted by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.



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