

## Measures to Overcome the Negative Impacts of COVID-19 on the Mental Health of Dentists.

Medidas para superar los impactos negativos del COVID-19 en la salud mental de los dentistas.

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### Dear editor

We are currently facing a serious public health crisis due to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). Among the many professionals affected by the disease, dentists are at high risk of contamination due to the dental care characteristics such as proximity of the oral cavity and procedures with droplet and aerosol production.<sup>1</sup>

In order to reduce the contagion rate, governments and health regulatory agencies have adopted severe restrictive measures for dental practice, which involved suspension of elective care,<sup>2</sup> and which resulted in great economic impact.<sup>3</sup> In addition, social isolation and distancing, the spread of false and incorrect information, the stigma of the disease, the scarcity of personal protective equipment, and the lack of social support and available effective treatment, can also contribute to generating mental disorders.<sup>4</sup>

The consequences of COVID-19 go beyond contamination, as they affect all aspects of our lives. Therefore, it is essential to have knowledge of the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of these professionals so that coping and psychological care strategies can be planned in order to assist them in redefining the future of their work and adapting to the new post-pandemic scenario.

Several studies have demonstrated the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mental health of dentists and the main conditions were fear,<sup>5</sup> anxiety,<sup>5</sup> worries,<sup>6</sup> stress,<sup>7</sup> job insecurity,<sup>2</sup> subjective overload<sup>8</sup> and perceived risk.<sup>7</sup>

Based on these aspects, it is necessary to implement measures to support dentists during the pandemic, which are:

- First, the dental team must know and strictly follow guidelines recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO),<sup>9</sup> by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)<sup>10</sup> and by the health agencies of countries to control COVID-19 dissemination and make them qualified to carry out their work activities.

- The provision of coverage for COVID-19 diagnostic tests or financial support to implement them by government agencies can make these professionals aware of their status, consequently protecting their patients, other team members and family members.

- In the case of dentists with confirmed diagnosis, providing information and support services to guide them on the progression and management of the disease through telephone or online services.

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- Creation of publicity awareness campaigns informing the population that dentists are prepared to safely carry out urgent and emergency or elective care in countries where this type of care is authorized, so that the dentist / patient confidence increases.
  - Ensure economic assistance to dentists in the private network through financial advice, granting discounts and facilities for the purchase of personal protective equipment, 70% alcohol, thermometers and other necessary materials that increase dental treatment costs.
  - Stimulate teledentistry using applications or software to facilitate communication with patients who cannot attend in person to the dental office, or those who are unsure about the risk of contamination.
  - It is recommended that the update on the pandemic situation be performed through official and reliable sources, such as governments and health authorities, and that news on social media be avoided, as well as the frequent search for this information.
  - Care for mental health also involves the continuity and strengthening of social connections through virtual visits with other people and other professionals so that experiences, feelings and concerns can be shared.
  - Professionals should take a moment to rest, to experience pleasurable activities, to practice physical activity, to eat healthy meals and to maintain an adequate sleep routine.
  - Psychological help, treatment of mental health problems through a remote platform, the sharing of informational manuals by official agencies to increase knowledge on the subject, with disclosure of the contact of mental health centers, are practical measures that must be taken to overcome the effects of this crisis.
- The negative impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of dentists is worrying, and further high-quality studies on these issues should be carried out in order to establish the effectiveness of the proposed measures.

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