COVID-19 Related Dental Practice Modifications Could Make Some Dentists Optimistic: A Public Health Concern of Emerging Importance

C. Gunasena[1]*, I.R. Perera[3], S.Ratnapreya[4],
R.M.S.H.B. Medawela[1] and N.S.S. Jayasuriya[2]

[1]Department of Oral Medicine and Periodontology
[2]Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery
Faculty of Dental Sciences, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya 20400, Sri Lanka
[3]Preventive Oral Health Unit, National Dental Hospital (Teaching),
Colombo 7, 00700, Sri Lanka
[4]Department of Dental Surgery, Asiri Surgical Hospital,
Colombo 5, 00500, Sri Lanka
**cgunasena039@gmail.com*

COVID-19 pandemic caused by SARS-CoV-2 denotes an unprecedented public health emergency. It has impacted profoundly and persistently on every aspect globally. Dental Surgeons have garnered recognition as a high-risk group. Recent explorations on perceptions of dental surgeons on COVID-19 induced dental practice modifications are painting a gloomy picture of pessimism, fears and uncertainties. In contrast to popular notion, we aim to highlight the positive perspectives and optimistic perceptions of a sample of dental surgeons from Sri Lanka. Males dominated the sample (74.1%). Their ages ranged from 24 years to 46 years. The majority were without any past medical conditions (81.5%) and had between 10-20 years of service (48.1%). Majority of them were practicing in the government and private sector (51.9%), while 29.6% were private practitioners and 18.5% were only serving in the government sector. The sample included 14.8% registrars, 11.1% intern dental surgeons and 3.1% pre intern dental surgeons. For psychological perspectives, majority (51.9%) strongly agreed they could contract COVID- 19 and transmitting it (55.6%). 37% opined that personal protective equipment (PPE) was safe. There were variable claims of societal fear of risk of transmission by association with dentists. Dentists perceived difficulties in adherence to guidelines issued by the ministry of health. Majority (66%) perceived that wearing the PPE was uncomfortable. There were mixed views of practicality of performing aerosol generating procedures. Majority were in opinion they find it difficult to communicate with patients. Majority believed telemedicine will cause misdiagnosis. Mixed views were expressed on reduced workload. Majority was optimistic on regaining their financial loss. These ranged from better infection control opportunities to patient communication and use of telemedicine. Further research is warranted in this regard across the globe both in developed and developing countries to boost the positive thinking in the dental fraternity.

Keywords: SARS-CoV-2 virus, COVID-19, Dentistry, Sri Lanka