

Teledentistry: A Covid-Safe Way to Dentistry!!

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The Covid-19 pandemic has drastically impacted both the patients and the health care system, dental health care system being no exception. Between the time period of the initial lockdown in March 2020 to the present-day various surveys were conducted to understand the effect of covid-19 on the dental/oral health of the population and the overall dental practice. One such report "COVID-19 and dentistry: Survey of the UK public" published in General Dental Council revealed how the lockdown led to cancellations/postponement of various appointments, and how those in pain had to live with it or self treat themselves with limited or no knowledge of the problem.

Another survey published by JISPCD- Survey of mental health of dentists in the COVID-19 pandemic suggests that almost all the dentists were experiencing some form of mental health symptoms and stress because of changes in their daily work routine due to the pandemic situation.

The question is how long will the pandemic stay? After first and the second wave and with an upcoming third wave, how oral health care services can be provided to those in need? The answer lies in a practice that started in the US Army in the year 1994 and which now is an integral part of the US health care system; Teledentistry, a potential solution for practicing safe dentistry in the Covid era and possibly the future of health care delivery in many other parts of the world.

Teledentistry refers to the use of technology to provide virtual oral health care, consultation, education, and general awareness.

Now an obvious follow-up question can be that how can it be beneficial?

Teledentistry will reduce unnecessary visits to the clinic, providing safety and reducing the risk of exposure. It will also help in providing immediate relief, as one can consult online and can be spared of any dental visit by providing appropriate medication and treatment at home until the situation permits for a visit to a dentist.

Delay in the treatment due to various reasons like transportation time and waiting for specialists' advice can be avoided, hence improving the overall health services.

It can encourage people to receive dental care especially to those who are scared of dental chairs or dentists. Kids are another group of the population who will benefit and develop a healthy and fearless dental picture hence encouraging a positive behavior towards dental care.

Teledentistry can also be used as a platform for providing educational training to dentists and for referring and consulting senior professionals around the globe and hence improvising the knowledge and skills for providing better quality care.

With so many potential benefits, one may be interested in understanding how this can be practiced?

Have you ever heard about real-time consultations? It is the way by which dentists can connect to their patients harnessing the power of various communication technologies like video call, etc. and provide consultation to them through these means.

Another way to do this is by storing and forwarding the necessary information, i.e. patient can either record a video or take a photo of the concerned issue and save it and then forward it to the

dentist, the dentist can diagnose and provide advice to the patient, this information can also, be shared with a specialist in the manner if required.

Like any other new advancements, teledentistry also comes with its limitations.

One of the obvious limitations is that the dentist is not able to physically examine the patient, and the diagnosis of the problem can be difficult virtually.

The rural areas cannot benefit from it due to a lack of proper infrastructure, also the reluctance of the uneducated population or the population below the poverty line can also pull down the growth of teledentistry.

Although many parts of the world have started to implement teledentistry as a part of the routine health care system, many others including India still have a way to go.

Although several things have to be achieved before teledentistry flies to its peak but results achieved so far are very encouraging setting the road sign for future discovery and improvement in the field. With all the advancements and a push by the pandemic, both the dentists and the patients will soon learn and benefit from the art of online consultation and teledentistry.

Thanks to the future scope of teledentistry and new technologies for being hope for covid safe practice.

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