



Editorial

Prayers and the pandemic!

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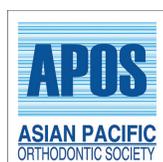
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As I write this editorial, we face grim and challenging times that most of us have never envisaged! Our lives have been impacted both on the personal and professional fronts. This is an unprecedented circumstance, and most of the health-care facilities around the world are just not prepared for a pandemic of this nature. The responses globally are toward mitigating the burden on health-care systems, reduce mortality, and encourage preventive measures until a cure is found.

I have communicated with colleagues around the world to enquire about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their lives and in their respective countries. What I could gather was that countries that have had a previous experience with viral epidemics like the SARS were more prepared or had better mechanisms in place to curtail the rampant spread of the virus (flatten the curve) and the risks associated with it, while others are struggling to come to terms with the enormity of the situation. One thing, however, was certain – there is no part of the world that is untouched by the situation today, and lives and economies have been impacted – more in certain parts than others.

What are the lessons that we take from this for the world in general? I remember listening to a TED talk delivered by Bill Gates in 2015. He said, “Today the greatest risk of a global catastrophe doesn’t appear to be a nuclear war/explosion. If anything kills over millions of people in the next few decades, it would most likely be a highly infectious virus rather than a war – not missiles but microbes. We’ve invested a lot in nuclear deterrents, but precious little in systems to stop an epidemic.” How prophetic! If we look at how the world dealt with Ebola, it was not that the systems to deal with the outbreak were ineffective, in-fact there were no systems at all. The response systems, even in the current scenario, have not been as effective as they should have been in this age of technology. The solution is probably learning from military protocols that are forever ready to go to war, even at short notices and scale-up logistics when needed. The ability to use tracking devices, advances in biology to fast track creation of vaccines for newer pathogens, will have to be a global responsibility with a mechanism that can respond in any part of the world in quick response time. Easier said than done – especially due to the economic resources and the political will that would be necessary for creating such systems! Nothing has united the world more than the COVID-19 pandemic in my lifetime, at least, and my optimistic streak tells me that health-care delivery models in most parts of the world would surely change!

The lessons for orthodontics as a profession? I have seen a number of innovative strategies adopted by colleagues and various stakeholders in these times – use of technology and technological monitoring apps for orthodontic treatment, having access to office data on a home computer, softwares that can aid bulk messaging and communication with patients, video conferencing for consultations, and communication on cloud-based platforms are few of the strategies that

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have been beneficial to both practices and patients alike. Some clinicians have been ahead of the curve and already had these systems in place, while the others have probably learned lessons to implement in offices soon. Residents have been training through online lectures. As meetings around the world have been canceled, video conferencing meetings and webinars with CE credits have been planned by a lot of professional associations at short notices – I think these will be an important method of orthodontic learning and teaching in future! A rethink of cross-infection control protocols and stringent adherence to them in all parts of the world, as well as reclassifying emergency orthodontic procedures in orthodontic offices, is a deliberation that the profession will have soon. There has never been a better time to create a “lifestyle triage” for all of us!

Dr Roberto Tan, the secretary-general of APOS, has reached out to all the APOS affiliates with a request “that APOS as an organization and all its leaders speak in one voice again, this time in a prayer, especially for those who need it the most.” It is an unequivocal fact that in these times – we are all vulnerable irrespective of race, religion, geographical boundaries, language, or political ideology. The common fear is destruction, and the only common hope is science and prayer! The common threads that intertwine us are “*Humanity and compassion*,” with a promise that the world will now speak in one voice with a common purpose like never before!

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