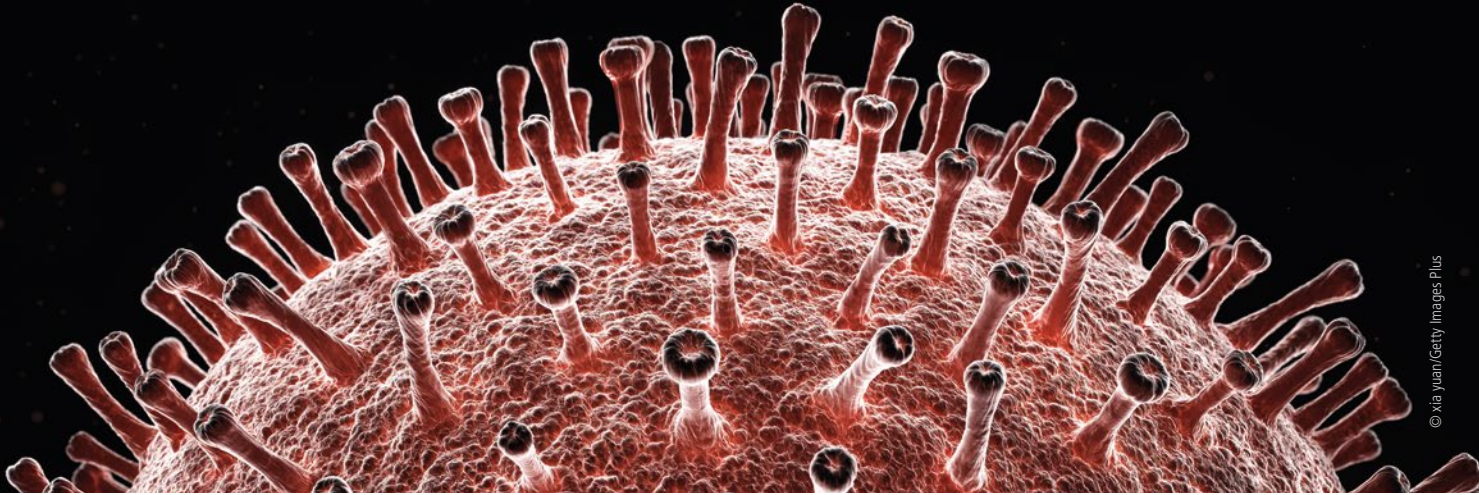


Coronavirus pandemic: A time for reflection



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David Westgarth

Editor, *BDJ in Practice*

At the time of writing, it is six weeks since Prime Minister Boris Johnson made his live televised speech calling on the country to unite, stay at home and save lives. In that time all of our lives had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Mick Armstrong's open letter to members in last month's issue drew attention to the size and pace of that impact, and that the BDA is committed to doing the very best for each and every one of you.

And fight your corner they have. In the absence of leadership from the Office of the Chief Dental Officer for England, many of you have personally reached out to me to express gratitude at the BDA's role and filling that leadership void in this time of crisis. With many of you unable to work, worried about salaries, CPD hours, UDA targets and business livelihoods, I can assure you those kind words have not fallen on deaf ears.

It has been fascinating to see how friends and colleagues have settled into what is, for now, the new way of living. Some have found their days unaffected, particularly if they hold senior roles within Trusts. Some have found

themselves being redeployed to where the need is greatest, and some have simply found themselves unable to fill the time. There is no 'working from home' for the profession – patients are the lifeblood.

Which brings me to what dentistry was like six weeks ago. Too little time to see patients, too many targets to hit, an inability to balance work and life out of the practice, and a recruitment crisis already depriving vast swathes of communities across England and Wales of access to treatment they really needed.

It is an uncomfortable feeling to think those concerns are on hold. Not being able to offer healthcare as a healthcare professional is the very antithesis of why many of you got into the profession in the first place.

During the lockdown I have seen live sessions on careers in dentistry, tutorials on posterior composites, tooth whitening courses and Q&A sessions, to name but a few. I can't help but wonder if those who felt the stressors of dentistry before the lockdown are the very people hosting and engaging in these sessions. This may be the first opportunity since many started out to use this time for reflection, to reassess, to give back, survive and recharge batteries. Stress and burnout – something outgoing BDA President Roz McMullan and PHE's Sandra White touch on in this issue – is rife through all tiers of dentistry. The mindset of 'I have to be learning and progressing to be better and more employable from the next associate' has a different meaning at the

moment. I saw a wonderful post on one social media channel that said if you want to be lazy and watch Netflix all day, do it. If you want to engage in all this dentistry then do it. This is a time to reflect on what we want as individuals for the greater collective. I fear those who continue to engage will put themselves at greater chance of burnout than those who do not. Webinar is the new buzzword. The mental pressure and anxiety this situation presents are unprecedented. We do not know what dentistry will be like when life returns to normal, but we do need a workforce ready to go, fully refreshed to meet the challenges that will lie ahead.

There is no shame in taking a step back and taking the foot off the gas. The BDA will pick up the slack for you – we will ensure those in government do not forget about the work you do. The BDA will ensure the GDC takes a fair and measured approach to registrants during this time and throughout the transition period to normality.

There will be challenges ahead – it is naive to think otherwise. Perhaps using this time to reflect on what matters the most will give the profession the reset it needed, at a time when it was glaringly obvious NHS dentistry in particular was not sustainable as it was. Questions will be asked, and there will be progression to seek, but perhaps now is not the time. On reflection, getting through these times is our greatest priority. ♦

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