

Dentistry:

Are we going to be the next Jurassic Park?



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Imagine for a moment we weren't being encouraged to stay at home where possible, but instead were transported to the Costa Rican island of Isla Nublar, home of Jurassic Park (keep with me).

Imagine that, ahead of the journey, you had seen and read reports of a monumental storm that hit the island, causing multiple failures in every system imaginable. The park was overrun with flesh-eating dinosaurs, picking off visitors at will, causing a seven-week lockdown in order to save lives and protect the health service.

Imagine that there are two groups – one compromising of businessman Richard Hammond and blood-sucking lawyer Donald Gennaro, and the other group consisting of Dr Ian Malcolm and Dr Alan Grant, experts in their field, both fully armed with knowledge and expertise, both specifically invited by the first group to assess all of the robust evidence to decide whether it is safe to fully re-open the park.

And then imagine that Hammond and Gennaro state that despite raptors running wild and free in the park, they want to open it anyway because they have research that says the threat isn't as dangerous as leading health experts in the country says it is. They state they want to get visitors back into the park as soon as possible, with a crisis looming in the dinosaur theme park industry if they don't, given the government's lack of support for them.

The experts are then taken on a tour of the research facilities and shown – by Hammond and Gennaro – every reason why they say it's fine to re-open the park. But the experts

are baffled – they've essentially made up the research to satisfy their demand – after all they do make all the dinosaurs in Jurassic Park female. But the staff at the park don't care – their livelihoods depend on the research supporting a re-opening of the park, so they're fully supportive of the research team. Could park employees have survived financially until the animals were brought under a degree of control experts declared it was fit for re-opening? Of course – after all, a Stegosaurus doesn't come cheap to make.

Meanwhile, Dr Grant recommends that only after the velociraptors have been located and contained should there be a discussion about fully re-opening the park, citing grave concerns worldwide colleagues have identified. His colleague, Dr Malcolm even states for the record '*you were so preoccupied with whether you could reopen the park, you didn't stop to think whether you should.*' Quite.

Yet Hammond persists, and, being the wealthy businessman he is, does not take too kindly to a situation where he is losing money hand-over-fist with the park closed, no income and a steady stream of fixed overheads leaving the account. He also does not take kindly to the experts pointing out huge holes in his research and evidence for re-opening the park; there are simply too many teeth roaming the park to do it safely. Dr Grant and Dr Malcolm concur – it can't be based on safety, because they've exposed the flaws in their safety protocols. It can't be because they have the loose dinosaurs under control because well, they haven't. There must be another underlying reason and as much as they suspect what it is, they both know it would be career suicide to say so. Dr Grant, remember, agreed to go to the park on the condition Hammond would finance

his dig for another three years and therefore propping up his line of work.

And yet, Gennaro, having decided to go it alone, is cruelly devoured by the one Tyrannosaurus Rex in the park. I mean, what were the chances? Hammond was sure his research was sound, and Gennaro agreed, even against the advice of the experts, who sounded caution in their approach. On the basis that the number of dinosaur related injuries and deaths had not increased more than they had on mainland South America since the dinosaurs broke loose, Hammond remained keen to get things back to normal sooner rather than later to avert the tourism crisis on the island. The initial curve of raptor-related deaths had been flattened, which was good news. He was so keen he decided to ignore the advice of the experts and listen to his own research team. In the meantime, the fine balance between averting the crisis and not being torn limb-from-limb by a Velociraptor tips in the favour of averting the crisis. A noble endeavour indeed, with many tourists claiming on their social media channels they are desperate to visit the island, so they are prepared to take the risk. They needed to stay alert.

And no, this is not my tipping point in my sanity. However, I will let you decide whether this is grounded firmly in the realms of blockbusting film fantasy or whether you are indeed theme park staff, dodging dinosaurs. For any dentistry to be fully re-opened and fallow times to be reduced, robust evidence is required. For a disease in its relative infancy, this makes it hard to come by. Yes, data do exist, but their sources must be considered carefully. If these data are not followed, the profession risks opening up the park to the raptors too soon.

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