

'From a dental point of view, we must keep smiling'



Reader panel member, dental hygienist

and therapist **Laura Marshall** reflects on her dental life in lockdown.

I'm working half a week at home. My lecturing role at college for the Level 2 dental course continues with online lessons. The colleges are closed for the foreseeable future. With exams postponed/cancelled, the students are having virtual mocks to help gain predicted grades. It is definitely a new challenge converting classroom teaching to an electronic platform but there is opportunity for creativity. I feel it is important to keep a routine and sense of normality for the students and myself.

I'm not working in practice currently in my role as a dental hygienist and therapist. The practice has moved to emergency only treatment and is rightfully taking a very cautionary approach to the treatment that is still provided. On my last day in practice prior to the announced lockdown, I contacted all my patients to postpone appointments and offered phone consultations with preventative advice. Everyone is very understanding; I feel that they appreciated having a personal call and chance to discuss their dental concerns. I also feel it is important to communicate the necessary measures that have been made to keep them and staff safe in working practice. In the meantime I'm looking to create some short videos for preventative advice. I realise teeth aren't going to be at the top of everybody's priority list right now but I'm hoping these

videos will offer support in a time where communication is essential and there is a necessity to feel that you are still cared for. If it helps to eliminate at least one of many concerns and promote self-care in a time where we need to be looking after ourselves, then I can feel that I am still fulfilling my role as a hygienist and therapist even with the limitations of not working in practice.

Presently I am waiting to hear if my practice and dental team will be deployed to help the superheroes already fighting against COVID-19. I will be joining my team and helping where I can.

Fortunately I've been fit and well so far. I am currently practising social distancing, rather than self-isolating. I am following the instructions to only leave home for essentials.

I'm managing as well as can be expected under these very surreal circumstances. Obviously these are concerning times and everyone has worries for their family, friends and loved ones. I'm trying to maintain a routine and reinvent my hobbies. My yoga classes have been moved to online classes. I've been part of virtual movie nights and quizzes. Piano lessons are through video conferencing. It has been on my to-do list for some time but I have finally got round to learning the piano! I hope by the end of the pandemic I may have achieved a recognisable tune. This is something I am hoping will be echoed globally.

Although there are uncertainties behind the current climate there is opportunity for creativity, versatility and reinvention. I hope to see many incredible artists, businesses and entrepreneurs emerge from these testing times. As individuals we recognise our resistance, in not giving in and in a sense of community that has become so evident in these past weeks.

I am certain many will share similar concerns: health, finances, the economy. With possible redeployment I fear for the health of my family and myself. Although I consider myself to be young, fit and well, I am not going to underestimate the seriousness of this pandemic virus. Like many I shall be

taking every precaution, including isolation, to prevent the spread and risk posed to my family and others. It is scary. But with perseverance and resilience I hope we reach the pinnacle of the situation in due course and return to a state of stability and control, having gained a higher respect and attained knowledge from this outbreak.

Many will share financial concerns. COVID-19 has affected many companies, businesses, and posed particular uncertainties for those self-employed. I am a self-employed dental hygienist and therapist and like many have great uncertainties of the guidance and what help there is available. Many professionals, including myself, are finding it difficult to find any financial support accessible in these circumstances. There are so many ambiguities behind self-employed dental care professionals (DCPs) and the ties we have to NHS workers. The outbreak has highlighted these evident issues and the lack of sustained support behind a DCP role. I hope a period of reflection and action shall commence to acknowledge the paramount skills a DCP has and to implement the recognition that is deserved. For many a large concern for the coming months is the financial impact to be had from these ambiguities, accentuated by the pandemic.

A last major concern is the effect the outbreak will have on the economy, particularly the NHS system and what world we will face post-pandemic clearance.

I hope in the end we reflect that we have made history in our actions and demonstrations of smarts, bravery and kindness. That we have recognised the importance of family and friends and created many communities that have maintained a sense of humanity. Individually we will have shown versatility and resilience to continue when times get tough. And even though our present times are testing, from a dental point of view, we must keep smiling.

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