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Practice Versus Planet

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There has likely never been a more difficult time to run a dental practice. We recently figured out how to be current with new infection prevention and control (IPAC) guidelines, while fearing the risk of having our doors closed by a public-health inspection. And just as we thought IPAC guidelines could not be any stricter, the COVID-19 pandemic descended upon us. As a result, some might think it's irrelevant and inappropriate to ponder sustainable ways to conduct practice operations for the sake of our planet, but I disagree. While this may be a difficult time to think about our carbon footprint and other ecological impacts as dental professionals, it actually also might be the best time, given we are already forced to rethink the way we run our practices.

The pandemic has allowed us to see that we are part of something greater than ourselves, that we are more interconnected than we appreciate from day to day, and that our actions have deep effects. It also has shown us the power of unity. We are doctors and scientists and, more than others, we need to stand for what is best not only for our patients, but our planet and future generations. As we already know, plastic pollution is a huge problem.

The extent of the health implications of plastic pollution on our health, and the health of our planet and most living things, cannot be ignored. The bottom line is that plastic pollution is poisoning the earth and those who live within it. Thus, every single one of us is responsible for our actions as individuals and, in many cases, collectively, such as in our own profession.


As we continue to serve the public, we desperately need to think of long-term solutions that are sustainable and do not increase the waste we produce that is causing harm to our planet. We are accountable.

The questions we must ask ourselves are: What is the environmental impact of the disposable items we throw out each and every day? What are the health implications? What is our responsibility as profession-

als and as a profession? What is the responsibility of the manufacturers who we support? What image do we want to provide to our patients as the world is moving towards cleaner and greener technologies?

Patients and the public, now more than ever, demand safety and protection, so they may want to see all the barriers. However, there must be a better way to ensure both, protecting our patients and ourselves, and our planet.

We need to work together to demand better options that are reusable, compostable and less harmful to our environment. Change starts with us, and in joining together as a profession to seek change, we can make it happen. If we do that, companies and suppliers and other scientists will deliver. But, if we close our eyes and think of it as not concerning us, or wait for others to fix it, then it might not happen. It may seem like an impossible task at this time, but if we think big, then it may not be as hard as we think.

We are leaders, not followers. We need to show ourselves, our patients and society that we are taking a lead in this area. As one of my professors in dental school always said, the two letters in front of our names stands for "directly responsible." So, let's lead, because it's the right thing to do. 



Dr. Alida Andersen has been working as a dentist in Toronto for the past 10 years. She received her BSch from University of Toronto in 2005 and her DDS degree from Schulich School of Dentistry at University of Western Ontario in 2009. In the last couple of years she has become an advocate for a greener and cleaner planet by bringing attention to the issues of plastic pollution (including becoming an advocate for greener dentistry). She has taken one day a week off from dentistry in order to work on this project through lectures and her YouTube channel (Alida Eco).