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COVID-19: Tips to Stay Positive During Trying Times

As I write this, our world has and continues to change in ways that we did not foresee or expect. What the near or far future will look like for us as dental professionals and as members of society are big existential questions.

There is no shortage of fear and anxiety; we are worrying about what we are going to face. Will there be successive hits of this pandemic, for how much longer do we need to fear the safety of our communities and loved ones, will our clinics get another shut down period, will there be substantial changes that we may need to make to keep ourselves and patients safe moving forward? We may also be worrying about the possibility of the crashing stock market or the likelihood of hitting a new recession period, and so on and so forth. Thus, this is a time for us to hear some thoughts of positivity and how to cope as well.

I'll start with my story, knowing that many of us have similar ones (if not worse). I have two children (four and eight years) and when the schools shut down in March, I needed to find a way to keep them at home, entertained and educated, in a condominium. I also don't need to tell you that losing 100 per cent of my income was not the best feeling in the world. To spice things up a little more, I had a serious knee injury recently and have been unable to walk much and do things properly even at home. So, did our days start with anxiety and driving each other mad while stuck in a little space? You'd be right to say that this was definitely the case for me in the first few days when the pandemic became a reality — but how to stay positive and sane during these times? How can we make the best of this situation and maybe even enjoy it? Here are a few ideas you might want to ponder, and they might even act as suggestions to keep the proverbial hand sanitizer container half full.

Remember our strengths

It is easy to start feeling lonely and isolated in our fears, and to be worried about all the upcoming changes that may affect the future of our profession and running our dental clinics. However, we need to remember that we are not alone in this; we are a large, powerful and intelligent group of professionals, and whatever we need to face, we will get through it together. Let's face it, if we can get through dental school, we can get through this as well!

Curtail media consumption

A great way to keep fear and anxiety at bay is to limit the news we are taking in each day. Yes, we prioritize being knowledgeable and updated with facts and news, especially when it has a scientific basis. But there is a fine line between being well informed and consuming too much information. As the pandemic and its aftermath unfold, there may be too much uncertainty or negative information that is unnecessary and not constructive. Thus, there should be a limit per day on the amount of media about the current situation being consumed. Otherwise, the news could possibly take over as our main focus and thinking space, which will affect our mood and mental well-being, and those around us; this can especially be difficult on our children. Our anxiety will become theirs, as it is hard to mask.

Take advantage of forced free time

What could be better than free time that may also be guilt-free? If we are forced to stay home now and during the possible upcoming waves of this pandemic, we should all take advantage of this unique situation, where we are forced to slow down from our busy lives. We could turn that time to special days with our families and



children and do all the fun things — albeit at home — that we don't normally have time to do. We could start getting back to our hobbies, such as playing an instrument, painting or reading; or getting things done that we've been meaning to do for months or years (even if it's as simple as organizing a closet).

Replace the thought of “social distancing”

There are better terms: “Physical distancing” and “mental/social connection.” Will we be scarred from such periods of isolation? How much longer before we feel safe to physically get close to others again even after the forced distancing is lifted? We are social creatures and we need to be connected. During the times that we are physically distant, whether now or in the future, let's remember to distinguish between physical distancing and mental and/or social connection. During these periods, we need more than ever to stay in touch with friends, family and colleagues even if it's through phone or other means of technology. Create electronic chat groups with your family, friends and/or dental colleagues. Text them, email them, phone them, chat on video apps with them. And do it often, if not daily. For instance, I was told about a Facebook group called “Dentists against Coronavirus” where all the members are dentists across the globe. If you are not a member already, you may find some funny posts that could help to keep your humour up.

The power of acceptance


Have you ever experienced a time that you are waiting

for someone or something? Thinking that every minute feels like an hour, and every day like an eternity? At times that we have no control over a situation, waiting for things to get back to ‘normal’ and getting disappointed every day with upcoming bad news, could feel extremely frustrating and dire. One very important tip with coping in these situations is acceptance. We should accept that things may not go back to what it used to be for some time to come and that for the most part, what's happening in our world is out of our control. What is in our control is how we perceive and how we respond to these changes. Let's find something positive and focus on that.

Reflect on the beauty of our unity

When have humans been so united? We are now connected more than ever as the entire globe has started to face one common goal; a war against COVID-19. This is a beautiful thought to ponder, and can give us hope that, if united, whether as global citizens or within our own profession, we could face and achieve

whatever we set our minds on. And let's remember, nothing lasts forever; sooner or later this period will be over. Pandemics do end. But questions will remain; will things ever be the same, or do we even want them to be the same?

Perhaps the world will change in some small ways, or maybe even great ways. And if we take advantage of this time and reflect on the things that really matter, then maybe we could all learn something positive; something that we could apply to our daily lives and to our profession. My hope is that this will lead to changes reflected in a healthier and more sustainable future for our children and our planet. Perhaps I will leave this topic of discussion for another time. 



Dr. Alida Andersen has been working as a dentist in Toronto for the past 10 years. She has 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. Besides her love for her profession and her patients, she has always believed in having a balanced lifestyle, and has been involved with numerous community work, public speaking and media involvement during the past 20 years. 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).