

COVID-19: Impacts, Challenges and Opportunities in Nepalese Dentistry

Dr. Ashish Kumar Bhattarai¹

¹Department of Pharmacology, Kathmandu Medical College, Bhaktapur, Nepal

Correspondence:

Dr. Ashish Kumar Bhattarai. Email: ashishakb33@gmail.com

Today whole world is perplexed into the apocalyptic pandemonium. Each day we are awaiting shoddier situation. The health system seems to be in the merge of collapse. Some hopes of vaccination and definite medicines appear, just as a twinkling light in the darkest night.

For most of us this is the first time we have faced any pandemic that has hit almost every country in this planet. Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) has not been involved in causing only the physical illness, but the rate of it causing the anxiety and panic is also overwhelming.¹

The first case was documented on 24th January in Nepal and while preparing this editorial it has already crossed 50 thousand confirmed cases with deaths crossing 320.² With this havoc situation, the dental patient fears the dental treatments. Already many dental clinics have shut down and many dentists have lost their jobs during this period. The prediction of the time frame of this condition seems clueless.

The main challenge of providing the dental care during this pandemic is the high risk of infection among the dentists, dental health workers, and patients. The New York Times reminded the world that dentistry was at the highest risk compared to other professions in relation to COVID-19.³ There are some early reports of transmission of COVID-19 through contact with an asymptomatic patient too.⁴

Practicing the standard infection control protocols can minimise the infection transmission risk. The

interim guidelines was prepared and endorsed for dental practices during COVID-19 global crisis in Nepal. This will certainly guide the practitioners and help reduce the infection possibilities to both the health care provider as well as the patients. The challenge is to follow this properly.

This pandemic and its consequences, have affected our livelihood with terrible tribulations. We can gratify ourselves to some extent, by adopting the changes this situation has introduced in our livelihood. It has boomed the use of telemedicine, and online teaching and learning. It has alarmed the policy makers and the government agencies to prioritise the public health and overall health structure of the country.⁵

In this condition, people are highly sensitised about the disease transmission and infection control. The fraud in dental practice is very rampant in Nepal⁶ and it has always been one of the biggest challenges in Nepalese dentistry. Although the government has laid out policies pertaining to the dental clinic and hospital setup requirements, which also includes sterilisation protocols,⁷ many dental clinics and hospital do not fulfill these rules. This situation of pandemic can be utilised to make people aware about such malpractice, its possible consequences and to prioritise the surveillance.

In the end, we need to understand that the moral duty of dental professionals is to reduce the routine care for fear of the spreading COVID-19. The financial consequences cannot be disregarded as well. Instead of availability of plenty of information, guidelines,