

## Hope for the Future in the Post Covid world -Personal comment

Linda Greenwall

BDS MGDS RCS MSc MRD RCS FFGDP FICD BEM

At the beginning of the new year 2021- we consider all that has happened in the past year during the Covid pandemic. A year ago, we would never have dreamed of what was in stall for us during this last year and now that we have effectively entered a third lock down in the UK- how has this impacted on dentistry? We have had to rapidly change and adapt to so many new protocols, standard operating procedures and adapt to new ways of working and risk management. We are living in strange and challenging times.

However, we always need to reflect on all the good that we still have in our lives and the special times that lockdown has brought with spending more precious time with our families or those that live with us. Many dentists are creative beings- creating beautiful restorations, smile make overs, orthodontic treatment – or helping our patients to attain oral health and healing is a great satisfaction. So,lock down has given dentists time to build on their creativity which in turn helps to feed their soul. Feeding our souls can help to lead a more balanced life, put important things into perspective and develop deep gratitude for what we have now and not pine for all the things we have lost during lock down.

On the last day of the year, 31<sup>st</sup> December, I received a call from an unidentified number as I was tying up loose ends at home and arranging to distribute 8000 units of toothpaste and brushes through the Dental Wellness Trust Charity which I set up in 2011. As I made the final arrangements to distribute the last 100 units to the North London food bank, the phone rang. It was one of the GP's from our GP practice who asked if we can rush down to a clinic in north london to receive the Pfizer vaccine- and was I able to get there within half an hour. My husband and I rushed down to the clinic on a bleak new years eve in the rain to prepare to receive the Pfizer Vaccine. I felt a sense of elation at that moment and a sense of excitement that the new year would bring hope for the future. A momentous occasion to lift humanity our of the Pandemic through a mass vaccination programme- again fortunate that healthcare workers, who had suffered so many losses were classified as Group 2 and thus priority for the vaccine. I had no time to worry about possible vaccine side effects as we rushed to get to the clinic within half an hour. After we completed the paperwork and socially distanced in the rain, I looked up to see some of my dental and medical colleagues in the same line. The sense of hope was palpable in the air as everyone stood socially distanced waiting their turn to be gently lifted out of the pandemic. A small step for mankind a giant leap for humanity towards the end of the Pandemic. This was a unique outing which I shall remember for many years to come.

There is a glimmer of hope for the future and rejoicing that hopefully soon this will be over. "This too will pass"

So, let's consider the Future on the post Covid world. What does that mean, individually and for our community and for humanity. What hopes can we have for the future? To quote Paul McCartney in his 2014 song, "some hope for the future, some wait for the call, to say the days ahead will be the best of all. We will build bridges up to the sky". We have learnt to show gratitude in the small things and the things most dear to us. We have learnt to reframe and reassess and rebalance life and change those things that did not bring joy.

Can we start making plans for the future? Can we start travelling without worry? Can we take holidays? Can we celebrate birthdays and weddings as we used to? It's time to look at the post covid world and the hopes and dreams that we have for the future and how we can gently make some plans for the future.

This year has shown that many meetings can be conducted on line which means less travel time, less small talk, less chatting around the water fountain- in fact there is no water fountain- that has been swiftly removed. This helps us be more efficient and organised and there is less time wastage. Parent teachers' meetings have been a delight- to cut down a normally 3 hour round trip to 15 minutes sitting at the computer (that, I consider is a win after 25 years of Parent teacher meetings!)

What lessons have we learned? We have learned that human life is precious and we should enjoy each moment with our family and our loved ones. We have learned to prioritise time for our family and create happy memories even in lockdown or when watching the Crown or the Queens Gambit together as a family. We have improved our cooking and baking skills, having to spend more time at home, learning to expand our repertoire of culinary skills. We have valued the precious time together and learned to focus inwards towards living a joyful life at home. We even have learned to celebrate family occasions on zoom together with our online family- we can make that meaningful as well.

What about our patients and the dental care that we have been delivering during the Covid Pandemic? Friday 13 March 2020, we gathered our dental team together and read one of the first scientific papers that had been published on practicing dentistry in Wuhan during the Sars Co2 outbreak (Peng 2020). We realised that day, that the way we were practicing dentistry had to change with immediate effect. I heard from my colleagues abroad that they were shutting their dental offices- something that was completed unprecedented. I reassured by dental team that their health and welfare was of utmost importance as we entered the first weeks of the pandemic. The following week, UK dental practices were advised to shut. The shock of the first weeks of lockdown lead to the realisation that this was not going to be over in a matter or weeks, but it was going to continue for a long period of time.

Initially, I was elated to be forced to stay at home- something that I had dreamed about for a while with an extensive list of things to do- to get the house sorted out-which was long overdue due to time constraints and pressure of work. However, once the pressure of the reality dawned on me, I started to set up a structure for the days and weeks that lay ahead. We were fortunate to lockdown in March with my 4 boys and my daughter in law- so that made us 7 people- then the hard realisation that that meant 21 meals per day! Besides all the cooking, cleaning and preparing meals and enjoying the special time with the family, I set about the main business of trying to rescue the dental practice from financial destruction and redesign new standard operating procedures and Covid Safe protocols for our return to practice.

I assessed how I could be of use during this time and how I could make the most difference during this first lockdown. After reading about the shocking situation with so many medical and dental colleagues severely ill and with Covid Pneumonia in hospital, I set up a prayer group to say psalms for healing with our dental colleagues. This group was a source of much comfort to those were saying the prayers and the rewarding feeling when those that were severely ill made a full and complete recovery, to be weaned off the ventilator and able to return home for the slow period of recovery.

The next strategy and one of the greatest and most rewarding tasks was setting up the WhatsApp group for the Women Dentists Network. We set up 4 groups with the main network, resilience, back to work advice and recruitment and jobs. This network of women dentists was nurturing, supportive and full of practical and sensible advice. The network also offered useful information on where to purchase new sources of PPE and reception screens that were mandatory before returning to work. To this day, this network has been a constant source of advice and kindness and that is what is needed now. Random acts of Kindness and support from our female dental colleagues.

So, what about our dental patients? Once the new protocols had been written and implemented, new PPE training was undertaken, mask fit testing, patient triaging and screening, staff training we were able to safely return to work. Our patients report that when they enter our dental practice, they feel safe and that is essential at this time.

Patients have learned that in the first lockdown when it was impossible to visit the dental practice, it is essential to maintaining excellent oral health and ensuring there are no further dental emergencies. Patients who may have been putting off needed dentistry, suddenly have insisted that they complete all outstanding treatment, for fear of being stranded without able to visit the dental practice. This meant that dentists have been busier than ever before. We have learned to listen to our patient's needs and ensure that dentistry is completed and that we take care of outstanding dentistry. Patients who might be putting off aesthetic dental treatment want to get their dentistry completed. We have been building bridges before but now we are ensuring we build those bridges quickly while it is possible now.

The message from Boris Johnson was "Go to your medical appointments" during second lockdown, patients have listened and are ensuring that their dental health is in the best shape. Self-care and wellbeing are essential and that has meant dental practices were busier than ever in the pre-Christmas rush. Patients were spending their days on endless Zoom meetings having to stare at their faces and smiles on screen during meetings meant that being Zoom gorgeous was a "thing" and they realised that they had outstanding aesthetic dentistry to improve and whiten their smiles. Outstanding treatment needed to be completed. Undertaking the most essential dentistry, improving their oral health and helping our patients to build hope for health and the future in the post-Covid world.

As we enter the third lockdown with the new UK variant which is more transmissible and patients are once again cancelling their dental appointments, this time it is different- the sense of realisation that "this too shall pass" and we can slowly regain a sense of new normality over the next year with more people being vaccinated daily.

This brings hope for the future, Hope for Dentistry, hope for humanity in the Post-Covid world.

I am reminded of the psalm 90:12 "Teach us to number our days so that we may acquire a heart of wisdom" Make each day count- Make the most of your days- gratitude in the small things, kindness and consideration.

With best wishes

Linda Greenwall

References

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## Lyrics: Hope for the Future, Paul McCartney 2014

Some hope for the future  
Some wait for the call  
To say that the days ahead  
Will be the best of all

We will build bridges  
Up to the sky  
Heavenly lights surrounding  
You and I

From out of the darkness  
Our future will come  
If we leave the past behind  
We'll fly beyond the sun

We'll be together  
Sharing the load  
Watching in wonder as our lives unfold