

Forensic Odontology during the Pandemic COVID-19

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There is a dictum that “All patients should be considered potentially infectious” during rendering of dental treatment. This statement should be adopted when any healthcare worker is on duty. As healthcare workers become a little complacent, a disease like Hepatitis B, HIV, TB or any bacterial, viral or fungal infection crops up and brings back the consciousness for self-protection. This is essential not only for protection of self from the morbidity but also for the prevention of transmission from affected to non-affected. One similar event that struck the world during the end of 2019 is the SARS COVID-19.

COVID-19 is a very fearsome, deadly, contagious and baffling disease. It is fearsome as it was affecting the population at a rapid rate with an enervating disease. This disease was life threatening with the virus mutating to combat the precautions taken to protect oneself. This disease was highly contagious and wiping out many members from the families. And it is baffling because there is no clear-cut evidence to suggest any concrete method for the prevention of the spread of the disease among the community and contain the disease. All the organisations related to the health of the population were suggesting methods of prevention of the COVID-19 affliction which kept changing from time to time. Since the identification of the COVID-19 disease, particularly from the month of March 2020 in India, it has heralded a “New Normal” in all walks of life. It has affected and changed almost everything including the education system, administration, industries and health care delivery.

The oral cavity is a potential site for causing infection as well as for the spread of it. Literature also supports the presence of COVID-19 virus particles in the saliva of the COVID positive patients¹. It has been cited by Nuzzolese et al.² that there are no cases reported of an infected medical examiner after an autopsy of a COVID-19. On the contrary it is generally believed that Forensic

odontologists are at high risk of contracting the COVID-19 infection. The possibility of catching the viral infection is high from sufferers as well as the dead equally. Hence, it was and is mandatory to treat every forensic sample as possibly COVID-19 infected.

New recommendations are put forth by forensic medical and dental associations on how to perform forensic work, when the work involves handling of living or deceased humans². From time-to-time the recommendations are revised or updated by expert committees appointed by the government and speciality associations in the correct handling of forensic odontology work during the pandemic³⁻⁵.


Two major aspects that deserve attention in the area of practice of forensic odontology are introduction of new technologies and to help in uphold of the dignity of the dead⁶. The technological advancements are helping in the conversion of all physical records into a common or globally accepted digital format^{7,8}; These can be rapidly shared and are contact free of physical objects. All communications have become electronic. Sharing of data, meetings and discussions are over the internet in recognised platforms and modes. In alignment with this, dental surgeons and hospitals should be encouraged to keep all the records including the models in digital format with appropriate scale. Consonant with this, I am happy to mention that the 18th National Conference of the Indian Association of Forensic Odontology was conducted under the theme “Innovations and Trends in Forensic Odontology”. Innovations and New Trends were also displayed during the conference with a number of dignitaries from different time zones sending their recorded messages that were played during the conference inaugural. Dignity of the dead was also discussed by the members in the forum as during the mass disasters which includes COVID-19 deaths, many bodies are not given the due respect they deserve.

During this pandemic, since March 2020 the training imparted in the art and science of forensic odontology to the members of the IAFO has also been virtual. The innovations in the teaching – learning process is continuously evolving. Like the English Proverb goes “Necessity is the mother of invention” the pandemic COVID-19 has necessitated a number of inventions in the field of forensic odontology. Newer methods are evolving which is making the work faster and easier and globally interactable. All the new rules and regulations suggested by the various bodies of forensic odontology are witnessing a sea of changes including in the collection, prioritising and analysis of forensic odontology evidences.

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