

Education and Communication in Times of a Pandemic



Worldwide, most daily procedures are experiencing an unexpected pause due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. Universities have significantly changed their activities, as have private practices—emergency dental care alone is allowed, and social distancing is mandatory. Insecurity and unpredictability with respect to the global future are certainly some of the very negative side effects of the current times. In addition, “social distancing” has become a buzzword; a harmful term that may be misunderstood, as the current situation is only about physical—not emotional or truly “social”—distancing. Yet, there is also a lot of good in these bad times. The lockdown leads to a reinforcement of social awareness and family spirit and imposes a general evaluation of the personal values in life. Many parts of our daily lives have changed in just a few weeks.

New research areas are developing in response to the current situation; for instance, in order to evaluate the fundamental issues in dentistry around aerosol generation. Negative pressure rooms are being built, recirculating respirators are created, new designs of N95 masks are explored, and new approaches are made to perform some level of care. These disruptions may change the future workforce in dentistry and the fundamental way care is delivered.

Very importantly, however, the crisis also changes the way dental education is provided—at least, the theoretical part of the education. As the conventional supply chain of education was disrupted, new opportunities were fast adopted with the help of modern digital technologies. Webinars of different content and quality are now available through various sources of the internet, mostly for free. Online education platforms, such as online academies or campuses, have existed for a number of years; yet it is now that they reach full consideration.

A very interesting initiative, as they are interactive and live, are the current series of webinars organized by different scientific societies (eg, for university specialization programs) and offered for free to postgraduate students of these programs. These nonprofit, noncommercial projects demonstrate very effectively how digital education and communication platforms can be used to establish a unique connection between universities, internationally unifying postgraduate students around the world and supporting less well-developed social systems with specific educational content. Through these web-based education and communication platforms, the conventional boundaries of teaching seem to be overcome. A much larger number of students and colleagues worldwide can now benefit from these educational offerings, and education has become much more accessible compared to conventional teaching. Certainly, the quality of the content must be carefully evaluated and guaranteed by the respective scientific society; still, these recent initiatives demonstrate the strengths that can be gained in these difficult times from technology, bringing the dissemination of knowledge to all parts of the world.

Nevertheless, the real value of personal meetings and connections cannot be fully replaced with these digital technologies. I guess we are looking forward to really meeting up again and enjoying being among real human beings—not just virtual ones. Better times will come for sure! We are wishing you all to stay healthy and safe, and that we will all come out of this crisis strengthened, diversely educated, and united!

Sincerely yours,

Irena Sailer, Editor-in-Chief
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This issue marks the introduction of IJP's “Bring the Journal to Life” video series. Scan the QR codes in selected articles herein for a video summary. New and exciting developments of this IJP initiative will continue to unfold in coming issues. Stay tuned!

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