

Covid and orthodontics

Dr Geoffrey Hall

In these troublesome days where many of us had to close our practices due to stage III restrictions, we are now fortunate (so some say) that restrictions in dentistry have been reduced to stage II.

So this now actually begs many questions, but in this short article I would like to address what I feel to be the most pertinent and topical.

- ◆ Is there a real future in tele-dentistry and virtual consultations?
- ◆ What will the state of the economy be for the next two years and how will that affect the general dental practice and what changes in one's practice will be required to stay afloat.

- ◆ For those of you who are practising orthodontics, what do stage 2 restrictions mean to you and how can the practice still produce income with orthodontics.

In the last couple of months, teledentistry and virtual consultations have been the buzz phrases – and now we see nearly every website in dentistry advertising and offering virtual consultations.

My belief is that it is impossible to achieve a proper diagnosis and/or treatment plan in dentistry using virtual consultations – but this pseudo-new technology could have many positives and I believe will become a useful addition in one's practice – if used correctly. For example, once you have a full set of diagnostic records and wish to provide a detailed treatment conference with your patient or parent – this can be an exceptionally convenient way for all parties concerned to have a virtual meeting to discuss all the problems, solutions and formulate a treatment plan – and explaining all the benefits and risks of the various options.

If you are using technology such as Zoom to perform these video consultations, you can actually record those consultations and they can now become part of your treatment record and more importantly provide excellent and documented informed consent.

Also by thinking outside the box, you could do virtual consultations with just a problem that a patient would like to discuss or they may just need reassurance – you can use images on your computer to perform explanations in a far better and more understanding fashion. This virtual consultation approach should not just be limited to the doctor, but now that this is understood by the general public, it can actually be used by any staff member



Dr Geoffrey Hall

to have discussions with a patient – and having those discussions face-to-face will usually mean a far more empathetic approach by the staff member.

I believe that only your imagination will limit the use of tele-dentistry and virtual consultations in your practice in the future – but to be used for an initial evaluation, is purely to provide the patient with the warm and fuzzy feeling of yourself and your practice and purely help to convert them into attending your practice for a live new patient/consultation appointment.

Unfortunately, no one really knows, how Covid will affect the economy either in the short-term or long-term. There is obviously much doom and gloom around – but historically we have had many recessions, including the most recent in 2008, being the GFC – and in all of these times of crisis, dentistry still was profitable (however not as profitable as it was prior to the recession) and then when the recession finishes, the economy bounces back very quickly,



practice, fill your appointment books and hopefully increase your income. I can assure you that there will be added benefits to yourself and your practice – as it will provide you with more fun and more enjoyment in coming to work.

If you do wish to train further in any field of dentistry – it's essential that you partner with the correct training program, and if you're interested in learning more in the field of orthodontics, I'm always happy to talk to you and make sure that you choose the best learning platform and educators to meet your specific goals.

If you are presently practising any form of orthodontics, stage II restrictions and possibly stage I restrictions, allow you to basically perform any orthodontic tasks that will not produce an aerosol.

We are fortunate in orthodontics, that very few procedures produce this

unwanted aerosol, and in our practice we are only not seeing those patients for debands (ie removal of braces) but technically as we do not use air/water with a high speed handpieces, we could probably perform this procedure – but I am looking at more protecting our staff in these times.

With regards to bonding appointments and placing brackets or attachments for aligners, we are trying to reduce the aerosol that may occur as we combine an air and water spray to remove conventional etching solution.

Our practice has adopted the one-step (all in one etch and bond) Popetch system, which unfortunately does not provide us with the same bond strength as conventional etching using 37% phosphoric acid and rinsing, but nevertheless provides us with an acceptable solution to be able to maintain our orthodontic production.

All other orthodontic procedures, such as wire changes, examinations, orthodontic records, etc are fortunately totally unaffected with level 2 or Level 1 restrictions.

My final advice – use this time to improve your practice in the area of customer service and up skill yourself and your staff and I guarantee you will come out far better at the other end.

Please stay safe and let's keep your practice, all dental practices afloat and may dentistry prosper again in the very near future *

Dr Geoffrey Hall
Specialist orthodontist,
Director of the OrthoED institute
geoff@orthoed.com.au
1300 073 427



Before and after: Extraction of a lower incisor