



Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Colombia's dentistry

The pandemic for the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 has been one of the most catastrophic events in human history so far for what it represents in all fields, including human lives loss, family distress, job loss, economic cost, and even political repercussions worldwide. Health care workers are exposed to contagion, especially those working in the front line serving hospitalized COVID-19 patients.¹ Similarly, dental health care personnel (DHCP) are considered as a high-risk population, as they are in face-to-face contact with patients during clinical procedures, and for the possibility of contagion in aerosol-generating procedures.² In order to prevent or minimize contagion and with the experience of the way of transmission of other viruses, the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and additional biosecurity protocols for infection control have been proposed.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on DHCP around the world has recently been studied by various authors, evaluating attitudes and behaviors, risk perception, knowledge, fears, changes in practices, availability and use of PPE³⁻⁷ and the like. In Colombia, a group of researchers from Fundación Universitaria UniCIEO and Universidad de Antioquia were invited by the Universität Bern (Switzerland)⁸ to participate in a global study on the impact of COVID-19 on dentistry. The questionnaire was validated (face, content validity and reproducibility) in a pilot test and later administered via digital media, from June 19 to July 24, 2020. This editorial seeks to highlight the most important results of the descriptive part of the study, which will be published in extenso shortly.

Sociodemographic aspects

A total of 5,370 surveys were answered by dentists (3,878 women; 1,491 men) working in 309 cities and municipalities in Colombia. The median age was 45 years (ranging from 22 to 82 years). Most professionals who responded to the survey are general dentists (42%) and work in private offices (80%).

Work-related aspects and effects on career plans

83% of the interviewed dentists said that they stopped working a little earlier or since the national government's declaration of mandatory lockdown (March 25) and did not restart emergency care until after May 4. The most common reason (66%) to stop or limit clinical activity was "to comply with national government guidelines in this regard", and 78% of them is considering a reduce in working hours in the future.

Protocol compliance and biosecurity aspects

Dentists reported high adherence to biosecurity protocols and use of PPE. 100% of respondents referred to following one or more precautionary measures. 90% reported using N95 or similar masks and 44% use surgical masks.

Aspects on knowledge, risk of contagion, and perception

Of the 5,370 respondents, 458 reported being tested for COVID-19, with 33 respondents testing positive. 96% of respondents believe that COVID-19 infection is a risk for dentists.

The survey included additional questions about tele-dentistry, ventilation, and air conditioning systems, which are being analyzed separately due to their importance and extent, and their results will be published in other scientific articles. This study is highly important because the survey represents a high proportion of the population of dentists working in Colombia. The voice of dentists from Guajira to San Andrés and Amazonas were heard in this study. The valuable data collected will serve to give recommendations to professionals, academics, and decision makers alike, and will help us overcome the huge challenge of the current pandemic, which often makes us all feel isolated, helpless, scared, or hopeless. But we can work together to achieve the much-needed changes towards a profession with decent jobs, fair rates for our clinical activity, and favorable government regulations that motivate us to continue providing our patients with quality care during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, and hopefully also help reduce oral health inequities in our country.

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