



WIN Newsletter February 2021

## DID YOU KNOW?

### *Positivity in the Time of COVID*

by Adela Laverick

*The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting us all. Inspired by the [Women in the Workplace 2020](#) report from the Lean In group, Adela Laverick takes a look at the effects the pandemic is having on female dentists and reminds us all how to stay positive.*

Being a regular contributor to the WIN newsletters gives me the sense of being part of a community and connecting with other female dentists around the world. Over the past 2 years I have enjoyed the challenge of appraising papers and reports and considering their relevance to us, the female dental workforce. However, today, with the backdrop of COVID, I find myself struggling to relate to a paper or article that I wish to share with you. Inevitably, COVID has affected us all, and with the continuing globally high disease numbers along with restrictions controlling our daily lives it is a difficult time to remain positive.

So, today, I decided that it is important that I share a positive message. That I remind us all of our strengths as women and our strengths as the providers of dental care to our patients.

## First, let's acknowledge and accept the problem

One of the best ways to reduce stress is to simply accept it: accept the situation we are in and accept our feelings about it. This is an attitude, not an action, and this acceptance will help us to manage our emotions.

So, what is the current problem?

The COVID-19 pandemic is a health and financial crisis that has turned people's lives and workplaces upside down. Women in particular have been negatively impacted and working mothers especially so. There is heightened pressure both at work and at home and it has become harder to find a healthy work-life balance. In many cases, the pandemic has highlighted how disproportionately things fall on women.

For dentists, there has also been a dramatic change in how we work. Our work is considered to be 'high risk' for virus transmission, and this reality has dictated that we change our cross-infection control protocols and wear uncomfortable PPE for aerosol-generating procedures. Some of us will feel at risk at work, and that vulnerability will be adding to our daily stresses.

Being a global pandemic, many of these stresses are completely out of our control: therefore, to acknowledge and accept them is a necessary and positive first step.

## Next, let's remind ourselves what we give to our patients

**Social contact:** As dentists, we are 'care-givers,' and whilst our main concern is our patients' oral health, we also care about them as people. Our patients are also suffering from the impact of COVID-19 and personally, I have noticed how much more my patients are enjoying a trip to the dentist. For many, it is a welcome change of scenery, a welcome conversation and the opportunity to 'do something different.' For me as a dentist I recognise that the social contact aspect of the dental visit has never been so important. I also feel very fortunate to have a career that not only demands that I leave my home to travel to my workplace, but also allows me to have social interactions with several different people in a day. These social interactions, however brief, help our patients and ourselves cope with the reduced social contact elsewhere in our lives.

**Improved quality of life:** We work with our patients to improve their oral health, oral function and the cosmetic appearance of their smiles. Good oral health can give so much more to a patient by improving their self-confidence and their self-image and therefore, their quality of life. In my experience, the practice of implant dentistry in particular significantly impacts on patients' quality of life. Over my career I have felt privileged to be able to help patients regain confidence in their teeth and their smile; to have patients share with me what a difference the implant restoration has made to their lives; that they can now smile with confidence, eat out at a restaurant, kiss their grandchildren, go on a date, apply for a new job.

So, let's remind ourselves that implant dentistry can be truly life-changing for our patients, and we are part of that change. Let's allow ourselves some self-praise and positive recognition for being instrumental in these life-affirming experiences.

## **Let's praise ourselves for all that we do at home and to support our families**

According to the Lean In report *Women in the Workplace 2020*, decades of research show that women do significantly more housework and childcare than men—so much so that women who are employed full-time are often said to be working a “double shift.” During COVID-19, women—and mothers in particular—are taking on an even heavier load. Mothers are more than three times as likely as fathers to be responsible for most of the housework and caregiving. 76% of mothers with children under age 10 say childcare is one of their top three challenges during COVID-19, compared to 54% of fathers with young children.

Women, let's acknowledge that you are doing an amazing job juggling the additional demands of work and home, and if no one else gives you praise at the end of the day, then please, don't be shy to praise yourself! Allow yourself to be proud of all that you have achieved in that day. Be flexible with yourself, your children and your daily timetable—don't stress if you don't achieve everything on the list.

And the best advice I have heard from a teacher throughout this entire pandemic is to remember to have some fun and play with your children: the value of play should not be underestimated.

## **Remember the importance of networking and connecting with people**

‘A problem shared is a problem halved’—I encourage you to continue to talk with friends, family and colleagues. Many of us can't socialise as we would like to at the moment, but we can still network and socialise digitally. We should remember that we are not alone in this crisis: we should use the many communication networks that are available to us, including WIN, to help us stay connected and in touch with our global profession.

Within the ITI there is the possibility to join study clubs from around the world—an ideal opportunity to connect with a variety of colleagues and to combine learning with social contact. In our most recent local study club, based in Scotland, UK, we had an ITI member from Boston, USA, join our audience.

Now is a perfect time to remind ourselves of the value of local study clubs and similar support groups. Some of you will be fortunate to have ‘Lean In circles’ in your countries, which offer networking and companionship with women in similar circumstances.

## Challenge yourself

If you are fortunate enough to have time, then challenge yourself to learn something new. Evidence suggests that by continuing to learn you become more emotionally resilient as a person.

This could be researching a professional subject or taking on new personal challenge. There has been an explosion in online platforms for education in this past year. It has never been easier to educate ourselves via digital content.

The ITI Academy has a wealth of educational possibilities. During my lockdown I have especially enjoyed listening to ITI Congress lectures, as I find these an engaging way to learn and I enjoy seeing the personality of the speakers shine through their lectures.

## Above all, stay positive

The situation is improving, and life will gradually return to something resembling normal as it already has in some parts of the world. In time, the added pressures of our 'COVID lives' will disappear and life will become easier for it. Remember, we are resilient and resourceful and despite everything, we are doing a great job—both at home and in caring for our patients.