April 2, 2020

Late last evening the ADA approved a number of interim guidance documents and recommendations as they focus on how dentistry will move forward during and following the current restrictions. It is important to note that these guidelines are based on emerging science as it is becoming evident through the ongoing pandemic. As such, these documents are formulated to be revised and the ADA is providing them as interim guidance because dentists need to continue to see urgent and emergent dental problems and prepare for practice when the restrictions are lifted.

The ADA’s recommendation to restrict treatment to urgent and emergent problems has, not unexpectedly, been extended to April 30, acknowledging that local and national orders will take precedence. Governor Lujan Grisham has already indicated that will also be her likely order. This is based on increasing evidence that “silent” spread of the virus by individuals showing no signs or symptoms is more widespread than first believed, questions about whether “universal precautions” are protective in the dental environment, and the lack of adequate PPE for dental practices in the face of a widespread shortage.

While these recommendations are sobering in the picture they paint of what things may look like when we return to practice, there are important variables that will undoubtedly cause these guidelines to be revised in the coming weeks and months. Epidemiological models describe a range of outcomes that suggest planning for the worst while hoping for the best. The ADA’s guidance represents the “planning for the worst” at this early stage and will be revised as models become reality. Widespread community testing, the availability of “instant” tests to identify carriers and the development of effective preventive and therapeutic protocols will change outcomes. As in past infectious disease outbreaks, there will be innovations in techniques and materials to protect the dental team. Everyone should recognize that our survival will require adaptation to a changed and unexpected new environment.

We know that what you want most is to get back to work and our efforts are focused on helping that to happen as soon as possible. We also recognize that your safety and that of your staff, family and community are the top priority. Our Associations are striving to develop and discover new resources to support you now and when you return to normal practice.

Our message is that dentists and the care they provide are essential. Temporary designations that suggest otherwise must be challenged, even as we make sacrifices for our communities. Our strength comes from our members speaking in one voice so yours is valued and appreciated.

Thank you.

Thomas J. Schripsema, DDS
Executive Director

Jennifer Thompson, DDS
President