

Virus lockdown forces Brits to become own dentists

May 29 2020, by John Gurd



Many dentists were forced to close in Britain because of the coronavirus epidemic, and some patients had to then give themselves a helping hand

When Dominic Price's dentist told him in late March to replace a lost filling himself, the Briton was left in disbelief.

"But this is the situation we're in," Price acknowledged, one of many in the UK forced to play [dentist](#) during the pandemic as the country's surgeries shuttered.

That is set to change when they reopen early next month but, for many, the damage has already been done.

"Two days into the lockdown and I was chewing one of the children's sweets... and suddenly felt a hard bit in my mouth and I think I pretty instantly knew," Price recalled.

His tooth implant had gone, and he was quickly on the phone to his dentist.

"I thought they might have some sort of system running, but my suspicions were confirmed and there (was) no way they can see anyone."

Instead, Price learnt that emergency dental services were restricted to those needing an extraction and he was told to go online and buy a kit to fill the cavity temporarily himself.

"I couldn't quite believe the dentist was saying you need to do your own dentistry," he admitted.

When the kit arrived at Price's home in Salisbury in southern England, his wife Susie sprang into action.

"It is easy to use and it's not too scary or anything," she said.

"But it does say on the back, 'go to your dentist within 48 hours of using this' and that's just not an option at the moment."

'DIY dentistry'

The lack of dental care in Britain during its lockdown, introduced on March 23, is just one healthcare area disrupted, with treatments for various conditions and illnesses avoided, cancelled or delayed.

Some serious diseases such as cancer might be detected or treated later than usual, adding to Britain's already horrific death toll from the pandemic.

The country has the world's second-highest tally of fatalities attributed to the virus, behind only the United States.

However, a review this week by the Financial Times found globally it had the worst rate of excess deaths—how many more people have died in total than would normally be expected.

"Increasingly patients have struggled to get access to those dentists, and even urgent dental centres, and they've resorted to doing DIY dentistry which is really scary," said Len D'Cruz, of the British Dental Association (BDA).

"We've kind of turned ourselves from a wealthy 21st century nation into Victorian-type dentistry where patients are doing their own things."

Patience needed

After more than two months, dental surgeries and other [medical facilities](#) will be allowed to reopen from June 8.

However, they will need to implement the necessary infection prevention and control requirements, including [personal protective equipment](#) (PPE).

The BDA welcomed the plans, but warned [control measures](#) and social distancing could reduce capacity by up to two thirds.

The availability of PPE could also vary among practices and limit the number of appointments possible, the dental trade union added.

"Dentists will be keen to start providing care as soon as safely possible, but we will need everyone to be patient as practices get up and running," said BDA chair Mick Armstrong.

"Dentist can open their doors but won't be able to provide a full range of care without the necessary kit."

A spokesperson for the health ministry said it was "working around the clock" to ensure frontline healthcare staff, including those at 500 state-run urgent dental centres, had PPE.

"Dentistry is on the supply priority list and we have established new distribution routes for the sector to ensure continuity of supply across all urgent dental care centres."

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