

## Impact on orthodontic practice during the pandemic

It's been ten months since the COVID-19 pandemic hit Pakistan. Initially the entire country went into lockdown and all elective procedures were halted. Orthodontic treatment took a major brunt being considered a cosmetic elective procedure in most cases.

I would like to share an audit of my orthodontic practice of the last ten months. It was interesting to note that responses from patients were variable. 42% orthodontic patients were eager to continue treatment and willing to report for appointments. 8% patients were willing but they wanted to defer visits when the infectivity was high in Islamabad area. 30% patients did not want to visit at all and also thought that halting the treatment by not reporting would not be life threatening. 20% patients just lost contact. They would not respond and finally showed up sporadically whenever they had breakages which would cause difficulty in normal function. I saw some patients reporting after 10 months. The reasons for such patient behavior were mainly fear, restrictions, parking a non-emergency treatment to a later time, dislocation from Islamabad to their home towns and economic uncertainty.

The entire disruption affects the orthodontic practice in multiple ways. Most important are prolonged treatment time with its deleterious consequence and deferred payments especially when patients have opted for the installment pay plan.

Although orthodontic treatment generally is elective but certain treatment mechanics need regular follow ups. Oral hygiene maintenance has to be monitored. The current times are testing for both an orthodontist and the patient regarding the outcome of their treatment. We all know that irregular follow ups decrease treatment outcomes.

What we must know is that the current situation is not what the world was expecting. It is important for us to learn and with my personal experience I would suggest proper communication with patients, understanding their worry empathetically, modifying mechanics and explaining patients how to maintain proper self-care, when regular follow ups are not possible.

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