



WIN Newsletter July 2020

DID YOU KNOW? COVID-19 Redeployment Stories

by Adela Laverick

We are all aware of the significant and far reaching effects that the global COVID-19 crisis is having on our profession. During the last few weeks I have been talking with female dental colleagues and have been struck by the wide variety of different circumstances in which we, as female dental professionals, find ourselves during this time.

I am very much at one end of the spectrum; I am temporarily unemployed and at home, and living in Scotland in the UK, still effectively in lockdown. My dental career 'paused' as such, and I have been presented with a unique opportunity to catch up at home and in the garden. I am telling myself this is a 'sabbatical': a time to rest, reflect, recharge. I feel very privileged to be in this position, and in Scotland, a beautiful rural part of the world with ready access to the outdoors. However, inevitably, I do share with others the financial concerns of a currently paused income and an uncertain future.



At the other end of the spectrum, I have a colleague whose professional role suddenly escalated as she had to take on the organisation of a group of UK emergency dental clinics and with this charge came longer hours, a heavy and stressful workload, increased responsibility and a very altered job description. Another colleague, Narinder, was redeployed from the Dental department of a London teaching hospital to the Obstetrics and Gynaecology department of the same hospital. She had to quickly learn new skills and adapt her dental and social skills to an entirely different environment - a challenge that she found both exciting and rewarding, whilst contributing to our health service in a way she never thought she would. (Narinder Dhadwal shares this unique experience in an interview that can be viewed at

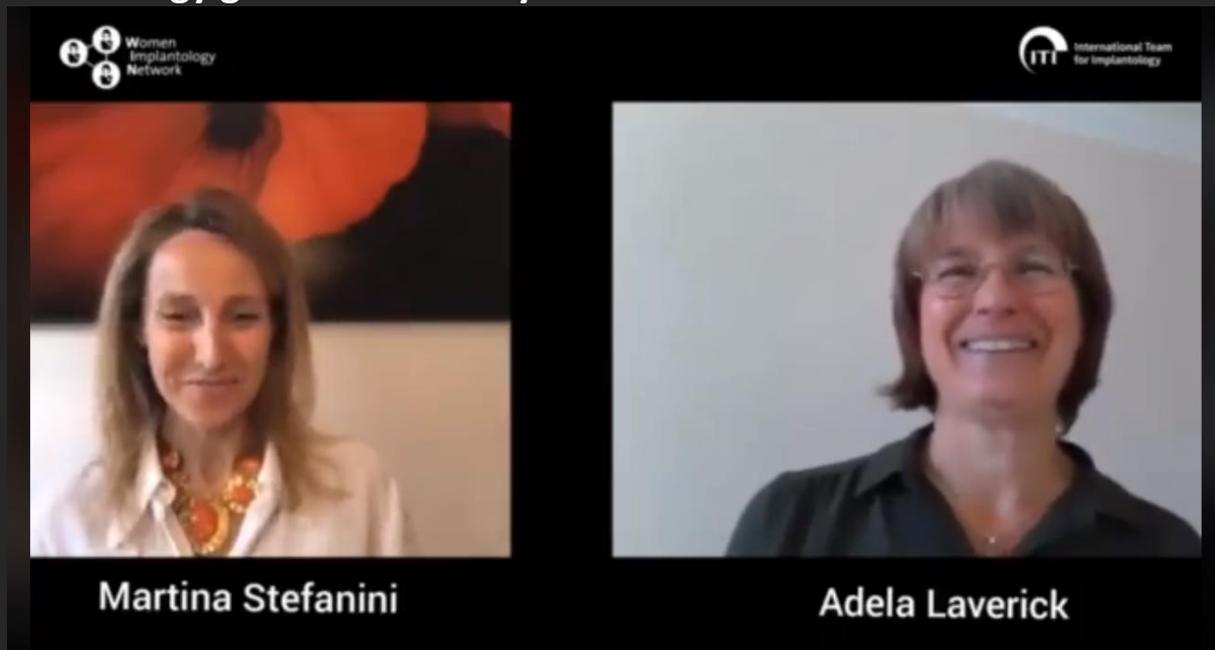
<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=185474906093542>)

Between these extremes are many other 'new normals'.

Women have unique pressures

I have been struck by the significance of home life in our 'new normal'. Women with young families at home have had a potentially very challenging time as their professional and personal lives are forced to co-exist in the same physical space. I think it is fair to say that in most families, the mother is the primary care provider for the children. Balancing the demands of the children - themselves in a very altered daily routine - with the demands of maintaining a professional role has required patience, careful time management and excellent organisational skills. Of course, these are skills that dentists will use every day in practice and, fortunately therefore, skills that we can readily draw on and translate to our altered home lives.

Technology gives us flexibility



Our academic colleagues have had the challenge of transferring their teaching to online forums: having to learn new technical skills and adapting teaching techniques to reach out to students over a screen rather than in person. Re-writing and reorganising educational programs to keep students' learning on track remotely whilst universities are closed. A sudden shift of skills and responsibilities, once again, requiring a willingness to adapt, to learn, to change and often to merge the academic and home lives whilst also caring for the children. Our colleague Martina Stefanini, Junior Assistant Professor at Bologna University and mother to three girls shares this experience beautifully in an interview that can be viewed at <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=863770400799983>.

Fortunately, the pandemic has come at a time when technology is so advanced that we can keep in touch via our computer and phone screens. This has also enabled us to stay in touch with family, friends and colleagues and has therefore allowed us to feel connected even when we are physically isolated from the world. Our family and professional networks will be helping to support us through these challenging times by allowing us to share concerns, ask for advice and explore other opinions.

Adapting to our changed environment

Having a network of colleagues has been essential for practice owners. They are experiencing a particularly stressful time having to manage the complexities of looking after their employees and their businesses during lockdown, as well as coping with an altered home life. Alongside the inevitable financial concern, there is then the challenge of preparing the practice and the staff for return to work in a world alongside COVID-19 with, at least to begin with, an entirely new way of working to incorporate improved PPE and compliance with stringent new regulations. In the UK, and I suspect worldwide, the guidelines are changing often on a daily basis. Interpreting the guidance can be confusing, and being able to share ideas and concerns with the wider dental community via professional and personal networks is key to coping with the confusion and is helping us to

move forward in the most appropriate way for us as a profession and for the safety of our patients.

Change can be daunting. It brings an inevitable challenge and demands adaptation. Whatever our personal or professional circumstances, we have all been faced with change in this current crisis. We have all had a period of mental readjustment to our 'new' but ever-changing 'normals' in their variety of guises. Looking forward, we are all having to cope with uncertainty about our futures: what will dentistry 'look like' post COVID, what about finances, schooling, childcare? For now, and I think for some time to come, there remains so much uncertainty and so many questions - both in our personal and professional lives.

However, what I have been struck by, in all of the women I have spoken with, is their overwhelming positivity and their willingness and capability to adapt. Their determination to make their 'new normal' work and their commitment to making both their home and their professional lives a continued success.



Looking to the future

We should remember that we are not alone in this crisis: as a profession, dentists worldwide are all facing similar problems and challenges at almost the exact same time. We should look to our colleagues for support and learn from those that might be one step ahead of us in this particular journey. 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. We are very much 'in this together' and with unity comes strength, and with support we are empowered. I believe, that we, as dental professionals are resilient and resourceful, we do have the ability to overcome these difficult times, and between us we will take dentistry forward to the next chapter.

I wish each and every one of you and your families good health and wish you all every success with your own personal professional challenges in our new COVID world.