Suggested letter to Provincial Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and/or Dental Directors

Dear [title],

I am writing to you to raise the concerns we hear from dentists across our province around the accessibility of personal protective equipment (PPE), and the forthcoming challenges that this poses to the health of Canadians and to dental offices in our province.

While we clearly appreciate the gravity of the current context, we remain concerned that dentistry is being frozen out of access to these vital PPEs at this critical moment when patients with pain and infection need treatment and are now forced to visit their local hospital emergency rooms, taking up critical time and space when they could be treated by dentists in dental clinics.

We would urge you to consider the oral health needs of the people of this province and allow dentists to have access through provincial stockpiles to a more stable supply of these PPE materials. This could be provided through the respective provincial authorities to the provincial dental associations for distribution to their members.

From the outset of the current crisis, dentistry identified the impending shortage of PPE as a critical issue. We have reached out through multiple levels of government to reflect that the critical shortage would hamper the ability of dental offices to provide emergency care, especially as the need for the highest levels of infection control would be necessitated by the context of the COVID-19 outbreak.

We recognize the multidimensional challenges that have led to the problems with the availability of PPE, with the current and unprecedented demand for these materials being exacerbated by with the problems in supply chains, especially in China. Early in the pandemic, when all hospitals were critically short of PPE, many dentists stripped their offices of their own supplies to donate to the cause in their communities.

In the coming weeks, dental offices will begin to open across the province, in accordance with the guidance set out by our provincial regulator. This will create a whole new set of challenges.

COVID-19 is spread and contracted through the mouth, and through the droplets that emanate from the oral cavity. This potentially exposes our dentists and their teams to particular risk. It makes the practice of dentistry that much more challenging, and it makes the need for appropriate access to PPE all the more critical.

While we had initially hoped that access to PPE through our traditional sources would improve as supply chains re-opened, or new supply chains emerged, that has not yet happened. In fact, access to some forms of protection, such as latex gloves, has become more difficult in recent weeks as raw material factories in Malaysia operate at lower capacities, and import bans on raw materials hamper production.

Moreover, individual dental offices are now attempting to acquire the same kinds of PPE as large government entities, who can squeeze them out by leveraging their might to acquire mass quantities, or through guidelines and statements to suppliers that urge them to prioritize supply delivery to those entities actively on the front lines of the COVID-19 fight.

The result is a supply of PPE which remains scarce, and at a rising prices due to the demand. At a time when dental offices have been closed for nearly two months, these are costs that can’t merely be defrayed by adding to the cost of services.

To avoid having people with oral infection and pain in this province taking up critical time and space in our already very busy hospital emergency rooms, PPEs should be made available to dentists so patients can access the care they need.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Signature