

June 2020



Dear Patient

We hope this letter finds you and your family in good health.

You may be aware that the government announced that dental practices in England are permitted to re-open from 8 June 2020 and we wanted to share our plans with you for the coming weeks and into the future.

These have been difficult times and although we are very much looking forward to being able to resume our services, our highest priority is to ensure that we are able to provide a safe environment for you and our staff. This means ensuring we have the necessary infection prevention control procedures in place and we are able to meet the current requirements around social distancing and safe working practices.

### **A phased approach**

In order to open safely, we hope you will understand that we will be taking a phased approach in returning to 'business as usual'. The timeframe for this will very much depend on a regular review of our standard operating procedures in line with the current coronavirus alert level (at the time of writing the alert level is 4, with 5 being the highest and 1 the lowest) and the availability of PPE (personal protective equipment).

During our closure, we have been working with our colleagues, peers, and governing bodies to ensure we are meeting best practice with the ongoing threat that coronavirus presents.

Infection control in dental practice is already at the highest standard and is at the core of what we do but, what we need to give even more consideration to, is the way that this virus spreads through aerosol exposure. Aerosols are droplets of fluid that are released into the air. They are created naturally, by way of us coughing and sneezing for example, but also created by procedures that a dentist or hygienist may perform such as using the drill or the ultrasonic scaler. This means that we must control these additional risks.

### **Steps we will take**

We will do this through a number of measures, by:

- avoiding any high-risk procedures and asking our hygienists to perform hand-scaling only while the alert level remains high
- limiting the number of surgeries in operation at any one time (this may mean that you are temporarily offered fewer options for scheduling your appointment)
- asking you Covid-19 screening questions in advance of your appointment and on arrival at the practice
- using telemedicine technology to communicate with you in advance of your appointment
- asking you to wait in your car (if possible) on arrival, to allow for social distancing
- operating a closed-door policy, whereby all entry to the building is by appointment
- asking you to sanitise your hands on entering the building and wear a mask while walking through the practice and when in conversation with the dental team

Of course these measures will be reduced gradually, as part of our phasing, when considered safe to do so.

### **How you can help**

We cannot achieve this without your understanding and support and you can help us by:

- being open to new ways of communication such as video calls or telephone consultations – this

will allow us to limit the amount of time patients spend in the clinical environment and may enable us to plan treatment in advance therefore reducing the number of visits

- using phone or email only to communicate with our reception team routinely and when arriving for a booked appointment:
  - not bringing anyone else with you to booked appointments, other than a carer (if your child has an appointment please ensure they are accompanied by one parent/guardian only and, where possible, no other siblings)
  - bringing as little with you into the practice as possible
  - maintaining a two-metre distance from other patients and staff
  - paying by card if possible, we can also take payment over the phone in advance of your visit

Everything will be explained to you in advance of your appointment and we are working on a patient video so you know what to expect.

Please remember, however austere these measures may feel, we are still your friendly dental team here to help you in any way that we can. We very much hope that in time we will be able to go back to some of our usual practices, however we may also have found some new ways of working that we can take forward.

### **Next steps**

Our reception team will be back from Wednesday 10 June and they are very much looking forward to talking to you on the phone and hearing how you have all been getting on whilst staying at home. Our opening hours may vary in the beginning, timings will be updated on our answering service. We will begin by contacting patients who have been waiting with dental problems with a view to running some clinics from Wednesday afternoon and then we will gradually start including routine appointments. Our hygiene service will resume in July.

If you already have a booked appointment it is likely that we will have to rearrange it as we restructure our appointment books, but please be assured we will do everything we can to get you back on track. All patients will be booked an initial video/telephone call with their dentist as part of their examination before booking a visit to the practice.

Do tell us how you are feeling about coming back for your appointments. We already know that some of you are keen to get back to a routine but we also recognise that not all of you may feel comfortable attending the practice at the moment (perhaps if shielding) and if there is anything we can do to help you remotely, we are happy to do so.

We would like to thank you all for your patience, particularly those who have experienced dental pain and problems recently. Please understand that it has been very frustrating for us as health care professionals to have had to close our doors to you all, particularly after caring for the majority of you and your families for many years.

Stay safe, stay healthy and see you all again soon.

Kind regards

Graham, Chih, Naveed and all the team at Katoomba