

Dental attitudes of patients towards SARS in Hong Kong

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Objectives: This questionnaire study was undertaken to evaluate the effect of a major outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), a new coronavirus infection, on dental patients who were attending a teaching dental hospital and private dental practices. Methods: 250 dental patients were interviewed by questionnaire and 213 were interviewed by phone. Results: More than two-thirds of the respondents were not afraid of contracting SARS CoV from their dentists and did not avoid dental treatment. Approximately one half (56.7%) did not worry about contracting the infection following treatment by a dentist. Less than 10% of the respondents thought that dentists ran a high risk of contracting SARS. From the patients' experiences, not all dentists wore face masks (89.7%) or face shields (21.7%) when delivering dental treatment. Conclusions: It appears that most dental patients in Hong Kong have confidence in their dentists, their treatment environments, and the infection control measures taken, and were not worried about contracting SARS at a dental practice. This perception is an improvement from that described in an earlier study, in which over half of the patients were concerned about contracting an infection during dental treatment and perceived that the infection control measures undertaken by the dental profession to prevent infectious diseases such as HIV were not satisfactory. Patients however demanded better infection control measures during the SARS outbreak. (The private donation for Research combating SARS (a/c 20003958) is gratefully acknowledged.)

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