

**Prof. Mauro Labanca**

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## *Per aspera ad astra*

We are unquestionably living in a difficult, complex time that will enter the history books. We are fortunate to be the first generation not to have experienced a major war, but instead we are living another kind of trauma through this pandemic.

Too many words have been said and are being said, far too many, about what is happening. This verbal redundancy confuses, annihilates, saddens and adds despondency to what the pandemic is causing. If *some* of us have been affected, directly or indirectly, by the virus and disease, we *all* have certainly been affected by the media pressure bombarding us daily, adding a collective insecurity and depression that our psychiatric colleagues are struggling to manage. I believe that in order to stem this situation, we can and therefore *must look for positive aspects* that, even if difficult to imagine, can be considered in this period, when we are all being tested as humans.

That our profession (especially the private segment) is among those that have only had to close temporarily and, when compared with others, has certainly not suffered as much financially; this is a primary aspect that should make us feel privileged and more positive than those who have really lost everything.

As an international speaker, accustomed to lecturing around the world, I found myself returning to full-time dental practice, what I studied for. And now, with no meetings (if not virtual), interminable business dinners or even congresses, at times frankly useless, it has given me the opportunity to slow down, take a breath and look around. *Looking around*, I believe, is the most important thing this pandemic has given us besides the physical suffering it has caused.

Why not use this imposed professional slowdown to do something else? Why not use this moment, in which we maybe have fewer patients, to reorganise our practice, to review protocols, to check that our staff are adequately trained and informed, to learn whether we can do something to improve the services we offer and be more prepared when things return to “normal”?

We could use this time to organise our patients’ files, to concentrate on our continuing education (notwithstanding the continuing education required by law), to engage more with our team, to think about how to communicate to our patients that we have used this time to grow, to improve, to change, because in difficult moments we grow, and *those who do not know how to grow succumb*. We miss live events—there is no doubt—but above all, we miss the convivial aspect of these events. The scientific aspect can easily be found by reading a book or a scientific journal, or following a webinar (provided it is of quality). Finally, why not use these quiet evenings spent at home to perhaps improve your English, to read a novel, to rediscover the value of emotions, because we are forced to slow down the crazy rhythm, often not justified, that most of us experience in normal times?

I hope that the SARS-CoV-2-wreaked havoc will be stopped as soon as possible, but even more so, *I hope that when the virus is overcome, a better world will remain*, more sensitive, more attentive, more aware of what true life values are—and then we could really say that, *through hardship, we have reached the stars*.

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