

Business as Usual IN THE “NEW NORMAL”

BY DR. JULENE SAMUELS
PHOTO BY DICK ARNSPIGER

Although pandemics have played a role in shaping human history throughout the ages, few people reading this today will remember outbreaks on the scale of COVID-19. There are, of course, some historical examples, such as SARS, “swine flu”, Spanish flu, even HIV. We have emerged from all of them by developing vaccines and effective medical treatments where a vaccine may not yet be available (HIV). We did this by way of surveillance, the isolation of those who contracted the virus, and strict quarantine measures. Even if traditional public health measures are not able to fully contain the outbreak of COVID-19, they have been effective in reducing peak incidence and global deaths. Pandemics do end, and fortunately, we now know some things about COVID-19 that we didn’t know just a couple short months ago.

As of May 21st, the CDC reports that the current global estimate of the mortality rate of COVID-19 is around 0.4%, but that beats the original estimate of 3% by a lot. The U.S. as a whole has a mortality rate of 0.167%, while most states report rates of less than 0.1% to 0.3% (Kentucky stands at 0.21%). The pandemic has been devastating in terms of loss of life and economic prosperity, however, measures we have put into place have flattened the curve. We are moving toward effective treatments and prevention, and we have much to be thankful for.

So now what? We have the chance to reopen our local economy, and how we do that will be so important. I would suggest that those of us who run medical facilities and offices should take the lead, and lead by example.

Tending to focus on the positives during this time, my practice found a silver lining as we endured a complete loss of revenues for 7 weeks, yet managed to retain 100% of our staff, optimized tele-health activities,



updated policy and procedure manuals, revised patient documents and marketing materials, finished long-range projects and clinical studies, deep-cleaned the office, and attended numerous webinars on how to welcome back our patients in the most health-conscious ways possible. We recorded patient education videos, fun videos, we had time for meetings regarding streamlining daily work tasks for the staff, and we worked to develop protocols for patient screening and optimization of patient flow in the office and surgical suite. We made lemonade out of lemons, and we enjoyed more time together and at home. Medical people are used to wearing masks, washing our hands after every patient contact, cleaning surfaces and treatment areas, keeping things sterile and our patients safe. Blessed with having opened a beautiful new office last year with an in-suite operating facility gave my practice in

particular not only a sparkling new facility, but also total control over the patient experience. Our office is a “boutique-style” plastic surgery practice to begin with. Our mission has never been to treat masses of patients in a day, and our new office was designed specifically for an optimal, private patient experience without the need for much use of common areas for patient check-in, treatment, or scheduling. Medicine and surgery, in general, are service-oriented career spaces, but also serve as excellent models for safe reopening that most businesses should emulate. To us, it’s all second-nature. We take these measures because we care about and respect our patients and our co-workers. Like so many things in life, it’s a marathon, not a sprint, and it’s not all about the money. The hardest thing for us to remember to do for a while now is to not hug our patients when we see them again! All in good time. ■