

# Life after COVID-19

LINDA GREENWALL INTERVIEWS LONDON DENTIST RICHARD PRAIS – ONE OF THE EARLIEST CONFIRMED CASES OF COVID-19 IN THE UK

## BIOGRAPHIES

**Linda Greenwall** is editor-in-chief of *Aesthetic Dentistry Today*.

**Richard Prais** is a general dentist working out of his five-surgery practice in London.



Richard Prais was one of the first dentists in the UK to contract COVID-19 – he was between cases 52 and 86 at the time of receiving his test result. Now, more than five weeks on from testing positive, he is listed as being recovered from the illness.

### How are you feeling today?

I'm completely better now – although I still have a bit of a cough.

### How do you think you contracted COVID-19?

I had been on a skiing holiday to Switzerland at the end of February and I think it was either there, or on the way back, which took me via Milan airport.

### How did the disease progress for you?

I was totally fine for a week after returning from Switzerland: I arrived home on 23 February and went back to work on 24 February (a Monday). I worked for the week and then started feeling lousy on the weekend – a headache started on Friday morning, which I thought was TMJ-related, so I planned to stay at home that weekend.

I woke up at 3am on Sunday (1 March) with severe diarrhoea (an unusual but classic symptom), fever and stiff, achy limbs. It thought it was a gastric infection, to be honest: I had no breathing difficulties or chest pains at that point. I went for testing at the Whittington Hospital later that day.

By Tuesday (3 March) the fever had been present for three days. The hospital called on Wednesday morning, telling us that I had tested positive for COVID-19. My wife was negative.

### What happened after you found out you were positive?

I called my two sons (aged 26 and 23) to come home so that they could be tested. I then called PHE for advice on what to do in the practice. PHE didn't advise me to contact my patients – in its opinion at that time, as I was non-febrile at the point of having contact with them, I was not infectious.

One of my sons came down with a fever of 37.4 and a cough on the Wednesday evening. He subsequently tested positive, so 20 of his friends who had come into contact with him were then tested. One friend, who had no symptoms, tested positive and was thought to be an asymptomatic carrier – although they were barely in contact, so we cannot say definitively that he contracted it from my son.

My own cough developed a few days later. I had a very mild case; my cough wasn't painful or annoying, although it got worse about a week later.

### How did you approach it with your practice?

The practice has been shut since 4 March.

PHE was certain that I was not infectious, so the practice could remain

open, but the advice it was giving at the time I was tested changed 10 days later.

But some of the staff were told to go home by 111 – to be honest, neither 111 nor PHE were helpful. We were trying to act with responsibility and integrity but the advice differed, depending on who we spoke to.

One of our patients called the local newspaper and suddenly reporters were calling the practice incessantly.

The press coverage was mortifying – people were making up stories about me and the practice, and it was heartbreaking to have our integrity questioned.

But our patients have mostly been positive: one, a teenage boy, sent me messages of support and those things helped enormously.

### What next?

I'm blessed that I had a mild case, and that my boys are home, and we're spending time together.

But the worry over the practice and the stress caused by lockdown are taking their toll. Income has dried up and the uncertainty about funding has meant that we have had to put our staff on furlough. The BDA is lobbying government, and it has been working really hard to sort these issues out, but it's still very uncertain.

Building up resilience and using this time to organise and prepare for what happens next is probably the best thing to be doing right now – as for the rest, we'll see!

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