Emergency Care – Patient Consent

Q. Prior to emergency dental treatment, should a patient sign an “Emergency Dental Treatment Consent Form” outlining the exposure risks to COVID-19 and acknowledging that the care is an emergency?

A. This type of form is not necessary because of the following:

1) The determination of whether the service is essential v. non-essential is one the dentist should make in his/her professional judgement. Patient consent has no role to play in this determination. If anything, the patient is merely expressing a layperson’s opinion that the service he/she is seeking is essential.

2) The screening information that these forms are documenting (i.e. whether the patient has been out of the country, has a fever, sore throat, cough, etc.) should be obtained and made a part of the patient’s record with or without this form.

3) The fact that the risk associated with obtaining treatment at this time was explained to the patient must also be documented in the patient’s record with or without this form. Since the risk is the same for all patients, dental offices should put a COVID-19 warning on the door, at the front desk and in the operatory so that every patient sees it. Providing that kind of notice plus a verbal explanation to every patient will give the same protection as these forms.