



The COVID-19 pandemic introduced challenges to health care in general that were felt at the private ophthalmology clinic where I practice in Antwerp, Belgium. Our highest priority was to safeguard our patients, our staff, and our practicing ophthalmologists against contracting and transmitting SARS-CoV-2. We therefore thoroughly assessed and mitigated potential causes of transmission so that we could continue caring for our patients as safely as possible.

CHANGES MADE

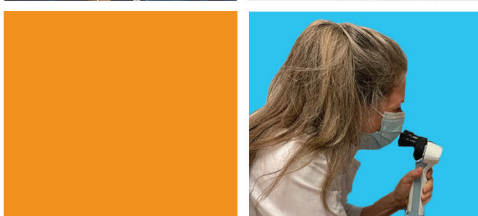
All of our staff members are required to wear masks that cover the nose and mouth at all times, and protection shields were installed at the front desk and slit lamps. Because infection rates tend to accelerate without notice, we monitor data and guidance provided by our government in order

FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE



Which changes in practice during the COVID-19 pandemic will stick, and which will fade away?

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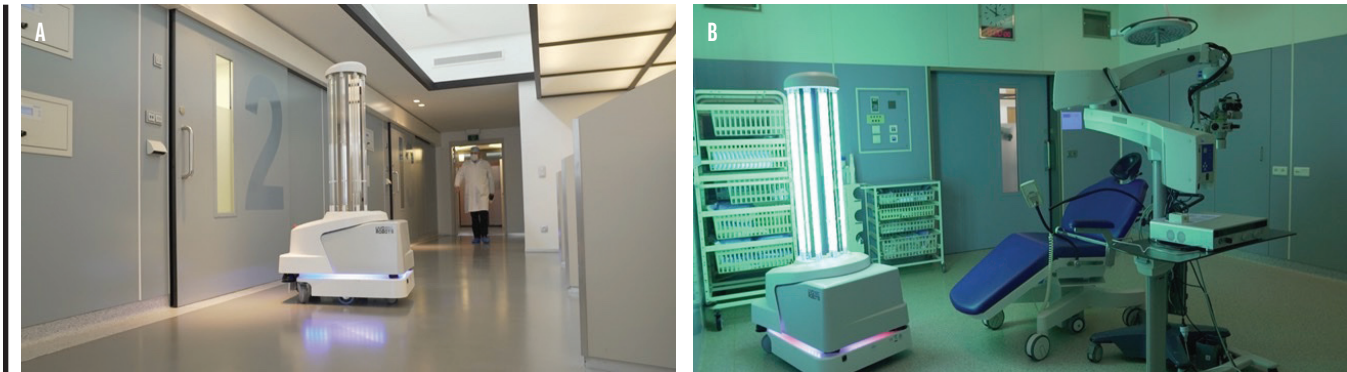


Figure. The UVD robot disinfecting the corridor (A) and exam room (B) at Medipolis.

to keep our practice safe and the information we provide to our patients up-to-date. This information is shared with our staff and displayed in videos that play on TV monitors in our waiting room.

We advise patients who have COVID-19 symptoms or who might have been exposed to SARS-CoV-2 to stay at home and to reschedule their appointment after they feel better or have received a negative test result. Patients are asked to come to their appointments alone, if possible, and to arrive no more than 15 minutes before the consultation. They are advised to wear a mask and to disinfect their hands upon entering the clinic with alcohol solution that we provide. The number of patients

in the clinic at one time is limited so as not to surpass the number of people per square meter allowed by our government. A physical distance of 1.5 m between patients is thus maintained.

Our clinic was the first in Belgium to begin using a UVD Robot (UVD Robots), an autonomous system that disinfects the exam rooms, corridors, waiting room, and the rest of the clinic (Figure). The robot eliminates 99.99% of pathogens in a room in under 10 minutes.¹ The goal is to prevent or reduce the spread of infectious diseases, viruses, bacteria, and other harmful microorganisms by breaking down their DNA structure. The robot is designed to eliminate human error, and it is operated by our cleaning staff.

STICK OR FADE?

The current pandemic has emphasized the importance of good hygiene and continuous disinfection. Our use of protective shields, hand disinfection, and meticulous cleaning of the clinic, including by a robot, will continue after the pandemic ends. In time, however, rules on physical distancing will disappear, the number of patients permitted in our clinic at one time will increase, and social contact will flourish. ■

1. UVD robots revolutionizing disinfection. UVD Robots. Accessed May 10, 2021. <https://www.uvd-robots.com>

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