

CODP response to Public Health England guidance on “Considerations for acute personal protective equipment (PPE) shortages”

The College of Operating Department Practitioners (CODP) is proud that Operating Department Practitioners (ODPs) have stepped in as a vanguard of the national response to the COVID-19 health emergency. ODPs have not only had to maintain safe emergency perioperative care but have also played a key role in expanding intensive care capacity, including redeployment to Intensive Care Units (ITU) and the creation of additional ITU facilities in operating departments and the new Nightingale Hospitals.

We are now gravely concerned that ODPs along with other healthcare professionals risk being faced with the heart-breaking decision of protecting their own safety and that of their families over compromising the safe care of patients. Even in the face of this unprecedented emergency no healthcare professional should ever have to face such choices.

Public Health England (PHE) published updated guidance for considerations for acute PPE shortages on 17th April 2020¹. CODP have supported previous PPE guidance documents published by PHE before 17th April 2020 however the updated guidance contains significant differences and we are concerned regarding the decision that where there are acute shortages of PPE, reuse of this is approved. The College view is that guidance regarding PPE should be based on the available empirical evidence rather than on any other factor, for example availability.

ODPs must adhere to the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016), including within the standards is managing risk and the reporting of concerns about safety. ODPs employers also have a responsibility for the duty of care of their employees. ODPs should also familiarise themselves with the COVID-19 specific information available from the HCPC.

CODP considers that any decision by an ODP to derogate from PHE guidance published on 17th April 2020 must be a personal professional decision made by the ODP in light of the clinical situation at the time. The College supports ODPs in adhering to the published, evidence-based guidance for the protection of their own health. ODPs must be supported by their managers and the regulator when making decisions essential to protect their own health and that of their families. Support is also available from their trade union representative and UNISON's guidance on PPE is available on the UNISON webpage². The College advises all ODPs to submit a near miss form on any occasion that the required PPE [as per national guidance] is unavailable.

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/managing-shortages-in-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

2. <https://www.unison.org.uk/at-work/health-care/big-issues/covid-19-advice-health-workers/>