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POSITION STATEMENT

Nurses Deserve Protection from Life Threatening Illness

Healthcare worker access to appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) is imperative. PPE is the last line of defense for nurses and other direct care personnel caring for persons infected with SARS-CoV-2, commonly known as COVID-19. Per the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the N95 filtering facepiece respirator is the most effective PPE to control exposures to infections transmitted via the airborne route, including the virus that causes COVID-19. N95s are designed for single use prior to disposal and effectiveness is highly dependent upon proper fit. OSHA's Respiratory Protection Standard for fit testing is temporarily suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The current PPE shortage across the state and nation is unprecedented. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) advises that *crisis strategies* can be considered during severe PPE shortages. For the past month, hospital and community healthcare agencies have required nurses to re-use one facemask or N95 for several days. Given the level of overtime necessary, that means a nurse may be wearing one facemask or N95 respirator for 60 hours or more in a single week. There is little guidance or oversight on how that mask is stored between shifts.

Recently, hospitals implemented untested methods to disinfect single-use N95 respirators and then return the used PPE to general supply. In many cases No effort is made to return the mask to the original user. On April 15, 2020 NIOSH reported the results of a small study conducted by National Institutes of Health scientists. Small sections of the N95 filter fabric exposed to SARS-CoV-2 was tested following at trial decontamination and found free of detectable viable virus. Then "fully intact, clean respirators" were tested for durability over two hours. In this limited use capacity, N95 fit and seal was compromised after only two decontaminations. The risk of COVID-19 exposure from a decontaminated N95 appears minimal, however the protection from environmental exposure is severely limited. Personal Protection is compromised.

The Florida Nurses Association recognizes the need to employ contingency strategies as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to strain the capacity of the healthcare system.

- Crisis strategies must be evidence based and clearly communicated to affected healthcare personnel.
- Facilities must reconcile supply chain issues expeditiously via open communication with local, state, and federal partners and public health emergency preparedness and response staff.
- Facilities must make every effort to return decontaminated N95 respirators to the original user.
- Nurses should allowed to use their own properly fitting Personal Protective Equipment when the employer is unable to supply this.

American Nurses Association president, Ernest Grant, best summarized our battle against this invisible, deadly enemy. Nurses "care for the sick and dying, putting their own health and safety at risk. It is both a moral and strategic imperative" to protect nurses and all healthcare workers.



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