

Frontline doctors plead for protection in fight against COVID-19

More than 70 per cent of Queensland doctors at the frontline of the COVID-19 crisis do not have sufficient Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and some medical facilities have resorted to making their own hand sanitiser, according to a survey by Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland.

AMA Queensland President Dr Dilip Dhupelia said the online survey revealed 84 per cent of doctors were not confident they would be able to access sufficient and appropriate PPE as they continued to work on the COVID-19 frontline and more than 53 per cent had dug into their pockets to buy masks and other protective equipment for themselves and their staff.

“By 8am this morning, more than 625 doctors had responded to our online survey which was posted at 4pm on Monday,” Dr Dhupelia said.

“These are both private and public doctors as well as those working in GP clinics in the community – the very people who are putting their own safety on the line to care for and treat Queenslanders.

“While we acknowledge that the COVID-19 crisis has entered our lives very quickly, clear guidance on where and when and how much PPE is available is crucial for frontline doctors and nurses.”

One GP wrote in the survey, ‘we are nearly out of surgical masks (which is all the PPE we have) and requests for supply have been declined. We are also out of hand sanitiser and making our own (with limited success).’

Another surveyed doctor said, ‘there’s a lot of anxiety in my workplace (operating theatres) about PPE supply. Also concerns that management may not be prioritising PPE supply. I think if staff had better communication about PPE supply, it would reduce anxiety levels and improve trust.’

Dr Dhupelia said Queensland Health repeatedly assured AMA it had a stockpile of PPE and no health care workers would be put at risk when treating patients with COVID-19, but one frontline doctor wrote, ‘it is painful to see and hear officials talk about PPE supply not being an issue, while on the front line in my Emergency Department, we are being told to wear the same mask for several shifts in a row (providing not high risk patients) in order to preserve PPE.’

“The Government needs to come clean to Queensland’s health workers,” he said. “They have every right to expect and receive up-to-date, consistent and clear information about where and when they can access the protective equipment required to do their jobs safely.

“Transparent communication about PPE supply and distribution is essential to instil confidence and reduce anxiety to our essential front line doctors and nurses.”

AMA QUEENSLAND SURVEY RESPONSES

Q1. Do you have sufficient and appropriate PPE for your current work requirements?	
Yes	29.71%
No	70.29%
Q2. If you are in private practice, have you curtailed your clinical activities / consultation times as a result of NOT having access to PPE?	
Yes	39.23%
No	18.98%
I'm not in private practice	41.79%
Q3. Are you resorting to purchasing your own PPE?	
Yes	53.03%
No	46.97%
Q4. Do you have confidence that you will be able to access sufficient, appropriate PPE moving forward?	
Yes	15.20%
No	84.80%
Q5. Do you have a clear understanding of what PPE is required in different clinical scenarios?	
Yes	68.52%
No	31.48%
Q6. Regarding P2/N95 masks, have you been trained to use it?	
Yes	41.40%
No	58.60%

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