

Supply of PPE is non-negotiable

The reliable supply of proper personal protective equipment (PPE) is simply non-negotiable, the South African Medical Association (Sama) says in response to calls from many of its members in the public sector that they either do not have the correct equipment or it is in short supply.



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"This is an untenable situation. Front-line medical staff must be protected at all times. This is especially essential for those medical practitioners treating patients with, or who are suspected of having, COVID-19," says Dr Angelique Coetzee, chair of Sama.

South African needs all its doctors and healthcare workers to be safeguarded as they are the most valuable resource in fighting the coronavirus. "Doctors and other healthcare workers cannot be expected to expose themselves to unreasonable risks, and provincial health departments and healthcare facilities have a legal, ethical and moral responsibility to protect healthcare workers who may be exposed to the coronavirus. MECs and heads of departments must ensure that enough reliable masks, gloves, goggles, and gowns are available at all times," she says

An added issue for many healthcare practitioners is that the facilities established at several hospitals are not in line with recommendations for adequate administrative and environmental controls to protect staff from infections.

"Apart from the lack of reliable PPE, facilities which do not meet the required standards pose a severe risk to not only

practitioners and patients, but also to all their loved ones at home, and our entire overburdened healthcare system. We cannot afford to risk exposure, and for healthcare workers to become ill, or have to self-isolate, as a result thereof,” says Coetzee.

She says healthcare workers sitting at home, self-isolating will not be able to provide much-needed care, and the capacity of the healthcare system will face potential collapse. Members who are not furnished with adequate PPE proportionate to their risk of exposure should not be expected to render services that may endanger their lives and the lives of others.

“We advise doctors who do not have access to proper PPE to refrain from activities that may result in exposure. We also call on them to alert Sama immediately if there is no, or limited access to PPE, or if their facility does not meet the requirements for adequate administration and environmental controls,” Coetzee says.

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