



9 April 2020

RCSI COVID-19 Update: To Fellows and Members

This is an extremely challenging time for everyone and I am very grateful to all of our Fellows, Members and staff for their courage, selflessness and dedication to their patients and the health service during this time of national crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic is already having a very significant impact on clinical practice across the country. Over the coming period, surgeons will face many challenging and stressful situations across every aspect of their practice. We recognise the personal toll of this on clinicians and, as you strive to deliver the best possible care for your patients, I implore you to **take the time to look after your own mental and physical wellbeing**. No different to anybody else in society, surgeons can face depression, anxiety and poor mental health. Your current work environment will contribute to higher levels of stress. Most of us will find ways to bounce back with little to no assistance; however, if problems are persistent, please take action and seek help.

I am anxious that the College assists you in dealing with these challenges. RCSI's Institute of Leadership has developed a suite of resources for healthcare professionals dealing with COVID-19, [accessible to you here](#). Building on this work, next week we will launch a **specific set of resources for surgeons** that will focus on **personal and mental health, individual psychological support, stress management and self-help resources**.

This week we have also focused on the substantial disruption that COVID-19 has caused to the professional and personal lives of our **trainee surgeons**. We are aware that many of our trainees and trainers have questions about the impact the current situation will have on surgical training and progression. We have been working closely with the Joint Committee on Surgical Training (JCST) as the advisory body to the four surgical Royal Colleges of the Ireland and UK on all matters related to surgical training. Our primary concern is the **safety and well-being of our trainees and trainers**. We are working in partnership with the various bodies involved in surgical training to find the safest and most pragmatic solution to the current situation. We hope that [this information](#) provides some clarity and support, and allows trainees and their trainers to plan for the coming months.

I continue to listen to your concerns in relation to the **guidance and availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**. Along with the National Clinical Programmes and the Specialty Associations we continue to raise these concerns at the various forums we have within the health service, consistently arguing that **frontline staff need to be adequately protected** for all aerosol generating procedures.

All surgeons need to avoid unnecessary risk through potential viral exposure as a result of inadequate personal protection, nor should you expose your colleagues or patients to such risk. I recommend that every member of the surgical team fully understand and follow the advice provided by RCSI and the surgical and gastroenterological specialty organisations. We also fully support the HSE guidance on social distancing for all health care staff both within and out with healthcare settings, an issue which continues to be a major cause of concern.

This week, our Surgical Affairs team partnered with Mater Hospital and UCD to commence a **feasibility study** on the wearing of **Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPR)** when conducting **laparoscopic procedures** and the **specific challenges of performing these procedures** while wearing **PPE**. The team investigated the suitability and usability of PAPR (Half and Full Hood) versus N-95 masks for peri-operative use by all members of the surgical team (anaesthesia, surgical and nursing). This study will continue next week and I would hope to update you all then on how the testing is progressing.

We know that there are cases across the country of delayed presentation to EDs because patients are afraid of contracting COVID-19 with the obvious risk of serious health complications and adverse outcomes. Some of this risk will be mitigated, we hope, by **GP-Surgeons Connect**, an initiative launched two weeks ago with the ICGP which aims to rapidly **connect GPs with surgeon advisors to assist in the safe management of their patients**. Already, the services website has received 1,600 contacts and each day the service has assisted GPs with a number of urgent referral requests. The feedback has been very positive. So far, over 30 consultant surgeons have volunteered their time to the service and the panel of consultants who take calls for this valuable service is growing. If you wish to volunteer to be part of the service, please email the Surgeons Connect team at surgeonsconnect@rcsi.com.

Our new weekly **webinar series** aimed at supporting surgeons in practice during the COVID-19 crisis continues to increase in popularity with the third webinar taking place next week. This week's webinar dealt with the impact of COVID-19 on current orthopaedic services, and [can be viewed here](#). Next week's webinar will update on 'Airway Management during COVID-19', and topics for discussion include:

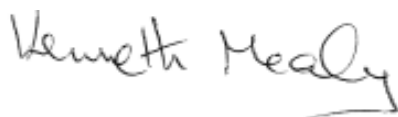
- **RCSI supporting you during COVID-19** (Mr Kenneth Mealy MD FRCSI, President of RCSI)
- **ARDS management in COVID 19 patients** (Professor Gerard Curley, RCSI Professor of Anaesthesia and Critical Care)
- **Guidelines for Tracheostomy insertion in COVID-19 patients** (Professor James Paul O'Neill, RCSI Professor of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery)
- **Open Tracheostomy Insertion** (Mr Neville Shine, Consultant ENT Surgeon, Beaumont Hospital)
- **Post-ICU Respiratory management of COVID-19 patients** (Mr Ross Morgan, Consultant respiratory physician, Beaumont Hospital)
- Q&A session with panel

You can register for the webinar, scheduled to take place next Wednesday at 6pm GMT, [directly here](#).

The RCSI National Clinical Programmes in Surgery, Emergency Medicine, Trauma and Orthopaedics continue to **develop publications and national guidelines on the management of patient and safety precautions to be taken by surgeons and doctors during the COVID-19 pandemic**. To date they have published 12 national guidance documents and three specialty guidance documents, you can access these documents [here](#).

Please, stay well and I would like to wish you all a very happy and peaceful Easter.

Best wishes,



Mr Kenneth Mealy

President, RCSI