

NURSES UNITED

Dear

I/we are writing to request that the Trust update its guidance on Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to allow all staff having close contact with COVID-19 patients to wear FFP3 masks. These masks, or the alternative reusable respirators, should be available for all staff performing close care for a patient, such as taking observations, taking bloods, performing personal care, or any tasks involving close contact for several minutes. Full gowns should also be made available in all areas, and our Trust's guidance updated to reflect they can be worn for all close patient contacts if staff deem it necessary.

During the first wave, shortages of PPE prevented staff being granted the PPE they needed to be safe and protected. Now, it is well known that this government has huge stockpiles of PPE which they have accumulated over the past year. The shortage of PPE should not be an issue guiding decision making on this question.

The presence of the new variant which is estimated to be between 40-80% more transmissible means that higher levels of PPE protection should be worn by all staff having close contact with patients infected with COVID-19. Outbreaks among staff could be avoided by allowing staff to wear higher level PPE. The RCN and Nurses United have written to PHE requesting this, and been rebuffed, but the Trust is able to go further than national guidance, and many hospitals are now doing this in recognition of the dire situation we face. As a result, we would welcome the Trust treating PHE guidance as the bare minimum PPE, as the floor, rather than the ceiling, of what is permitted to be worn.

To stick rigidly to the old PPE guidance would be to ignore the greater amount of knowledge we have regarding COVID-19 transmission, the new strain, and the different situation we face regarding PPE supply during this wave. Changing guidance to allow FFP3 masks and gowns to be worn for all close patient contacts would allow staff to exercise their clinical judgement as to what level of protection is required to be safe.

Given the pressures on staffing levels, the higher numbers of staff going off sick, the risk to their health and wellbeing, and the added pressure this puts on the service we urge you to update the PPE guidance and make available to all staff the best level of protection possible.

Regards,