



MEDIA RELEASE

Ontario Nurses' Association

ONA welcomes new measures to protect hospital nurses and the patients they care for

TORONTO, ON, March 30, 2020 – The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) welcomes important new measures announced today to protect the health and safety of hospital workers and their patients.

The joint statement was developed by ONA, the Chief Medical Officer of Health, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development. The statement provides much-needed clarity on the use of personal protective equipment (PPE) in hospital settings while managing the current COVID-19 pandemic.

“We have spoken out, loud and clear, at government tables that protecting the health and safety of nurses is paramount and we welcome these new measures for the hospital sector,” ONA President Vicki McKenna, RN, says. “This enables nurses to use the precautionary principle to prevent exposure to and transmission of COVID-19, something that ONA has been advocating for from the start.”

With these new measures, a nurse can determine – based on their professional and clinical judgement – that they require access to protective equipment, such as an N95 respirator to care for a suspected, presumed or positive COVID-19 patient, and the employer will not unreasonably deny access to it. In addition, a point-of-care risk assessment will be performed before every patient interaction to ensure hospital front-line registered nurses have the specific PPE that they need.

Also included is a commitment to the conservation and stewardship of PPE to ensure the health and safety of nurses, health-care workers and patients throughout this pandemic.

Over the past several weeks, hospitals across the province had been implementing policies and procedures around the distribution of PPE based on availability and on directions and recommendations. “There have been variations and inconsistencies, as well as confusion caused by the many rules and directions. These new measures greatly help to clarify decision-making and streamline PPE access and use,” McKenna notes. “If our health-care workers are safe and healthy, they will be there for patients throughout the pandemic.”

“This is a positive step for the hospital sector, but we also need to consider the other health-care sectors, including long-term care, public health, community care, home care, and more,” McKenna says. “This would not have been possible without thousands of our front-line members speaking out and telling their stories to ONA. These new measures will assist and support us all as we continue to fight this virus.”

ONA is the union representing more than 68,000 registered nurses and health-care professionals, as well as 18,000 nursing student affiliates, providing care in hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, clinics and industry.

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