



COLLEGE OF SURGEONS, SINGAPORE

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SINGAPORE

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14 April 2020

CSS Statement on Surgical Response During COVID -19 Pandemic

Since the beginning of the year, the spread of COVID-19 has led to a global pandemic. The crisis has had a great impact on our healthcare system. If unchecked, the rapidly evolving pandemic may potentially kill many around the world, including healthcare workers.

Surgeons and healthcare workers form the foundation of surgical care of our healthcare system. Healthcare workers now face a difficult clinical reality. With the rising risk of community transmission, both patients and surgeons run the risks of contracting the disease. As responsible healthcare workers, it is essential that the surgical community be well prepared for the rapidly evolving situation. We should do our best to reduce viral transmission. We should also look after our health and enhance our ability to care for our patients.

Healthcare institutions and surgeons should review the clinical situation and prioritize elective cases accordingly, based on hospital logistics and clinical judgement, taking into account the patients' medical circumstances. Non-essential surgery should be rescheduled or postponed. It is important and strategic to conserve valuable resources in preparation for essential and urgent surgical care. High volume hospital traffic increases the risks of viral transmission. We need to take important steps to minimise spread between patients (asymptomatic / symptomatic) and health care workers. Individual surgeons should exercise their best judgment in the interest of patients, taking into consideration the patients' medical condition(s).

If necessary, alternative non-operative treatments may be considered if clinically appropriate.

Preoperative patients should be screened based on the current guidelines (clinical symptoms, history of travel, exposure, quarantine, stay home notice, etc). Specific testing for Covid 19 virus should be based on clinical grounds and test availability, according to current protocol of the healthcare institutions.

Personal protective equipment (PPE) and Safety in Operation Theatre

Aerosolization and droplet transmission of the COVID-19 virus pose potential risks for the surgical team. Use of enhanced PPE (N95, eye protection) is recommended for every surgical procedure performed on a patient with confirmed COVID-19 infection or a suspected infected patient. The risk increases with procedures such as endotracheal intubation, endoscopy etc. Enhanced PPE (eg. N95 respirators and eye protection/ face shield) is recommended when performing aerosol-generating procedures involving the respiratory tract or GI tract (eg. OGD, Colonoscopy etc).

Surgeons and OT personnel, except the anaesthesia team, should remain outside the operating room until anaesthetist has completed induction/intubation or extubation, for patients with or suspected COVID-19 infection. The number of personnel in the operation theatre should be minimized throughout the procedure. Visitors to operation theatre should be disallowed.

Whenever possible, surgery should be performed by experienced surgical staff to minimise operative time and potential complications. These measures could have an impact on surgical training and education for the trainees / residents / fellows and medical students.

There is currently limited data to recommend for or against laparoscopic surgery. However, on the safe side, precautionary measures may be used to minimise aerosolization during laparoscopy. Appropriate PPE should be used. Laparoscopy has the proven benefit of shorter hospitalization amongst other advantages and is currently not contraindicated if performed by experienced surgical team.

For the benefit of patients, surgeons should use their best clinical judgment to choose the most appropriate approach in a timely manner, based on current evidence and resource. We should monitor emerging evidence and improve our practice accordingly. However, where the clinical and scientific evidence is lacking, common sense and prudence should apply.

The College supports the general and specific measures taken by MOH / government agencies and healthcare institutions for the well-being of the nation.

The College encourages surgeons to practise universal precautions, personal and hand hygiene, crowd avoidance and social distancing. As surgeons, we have a moral and social responsibility to keep ourselves healthy and safe to protect the well-being of our patients, colleagues, family and friends.

The College encourages all fellows in the public and private institutions to share their experience, good practice and tips with the surgical community. Surgeons with leadership positions in the public institutions are encouraged to share their protocols and guidelines.

All fellows are invited to communicate with the College and the Chapters the challenges they are facing (email: css@ams.edu.sg). The College and the Specialty Chapters will try our best to address the issues. The College empathizes with the difficulties faced by surgeons both in the public and private sectors. Ultimately, health is most important and all other factors are secondary.

The Council

College of Surgeons, Singapore