

Challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic – perfusionists experience at University Hospital Centre Zagreb

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The COVID-19 pandemic is putting health services, including cardiac surgery units, under increasing pressure. The Heart Team is faced with a new challenge embodied in the emergence of a new, unknown virus and the disease it causes, which leads to great uncertainty. However, the decision to operate is inevitable, which is considered time-sensitive, as delaying the procedure may cause harm to the patient. The issue of the potential risk of aerosolization or virus contamination via oxygenators or chest drains is also an under-recognized way of spreading the virus, which can put patients and healthcare workers at the greatest risk of infection. Although most membrane oxygenators in use today are surface-coated, there is no evidence in the literature to suggest that viruses cannot penetrate these hollow fiber materials.¹ Viruses from the Coronaviridae family (i.e., SARS) are between 0.08 and 0.15 microns in size. Around the world, medical care is hampered by critical shortages not only of equipment but also of obstacles in the blood supply. Blood management for patients should be considered a strategic approach in times when there is an urgent need to optimize healthcare resources and reduce pressure on the blood supply. Both healthcare professionals and perfusionists are faced with the challenges of working in a completely new environment with very little new information, exhaustion due to heavy workloads and protective equipment, fear of infecting oneself and others, feeling powerless in the fight against illness, and managing relationships in this stressful situation.

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LITERATURE

1. Squicciarro E, Rociola R, Haumann RG, Grasso S, Lorusso R, Paparella D. Extracorporeal Oxygenation and Coronavirus Disease 2019 Epidemic: Is the Membrane Fail-Safe to Cross Contamination? *ASAIO J.* 2020 Aug;66(8):841-843. <https://doi.org/10.1097/MAT.0000000000001199>