

MEDIA STATEMENT

25 November 2020

Statement regarding ICEG's comments blaming healthcare workers for COVID-19 transmission

The Australian Society of Anaesthetists (ASA) has joined the growing chorus of health organisations and medical personnel fast losing confidence in the Commonwealth's Infection Control Expert Group (ICEG) as frontline workers dispute the lack of action in protecting them from COVID-19 transmission in the workplace.

Anaesthetists and our many colleagues were insulted, offended and appalled by ICEG comments made to the media in the past week. The two ICEG members claimed healthcare workers were apathetic about infection control while also claiming there was 'hysteria' about aerosol transmission of COVID-19.

The ASA began raising the alarm about infection control concerns right from the start of the pandemic and has called for more appropriate infection prevention and control measures since early March as we recognised anaesthetists would be at greater risk for contracting and transmitting COVID-19.

We developed guidelines on best practice for pandemic planning, airway management and staff protection as we perform some of the most high-risk aerosol generating procedures like intubation. We've been vocal advocating for improved recommendations for personal protective equipment (PPE), fit-testing, mandatory P2/N95s and workplace safety control.

We are not necessarily the experts but we have readily sought them out. We only wish the ICEG would do the same and seek advice on things that are clearly outside their own expertise.

For Australian healthcare workers this has been a long eight months of fighting COVID but we have also had to fight every step of the way for the protection of healthcare workers. We are actually a few steps ahead of you, ICEG. We always have been.

After we flattened the first curve, we asked you to stop calling us heroes and please provide us with the protection we need to address infection control concerns. Now that we have flattened the second curve, we ask you to please stop gaslighting us. An apology may not be enough.

The above statement can be attributed to Dr Suzi Nou, ASA President.

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The ASA, with more than 3,700 members, is the peak body and leading representative of anaesthetists in Australia. Since 1934 the ASA has been supporting, representing and educating anaesthetists to ensure the safest high-quality patient care.