Make sure PPE is designed to fit everyone

JUN 15, 2021

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The current unisex personal protective equipment (PPE)—items such as gloves, masks, safety glasses and shoes, earplugs or muffrs, hard hats, respirators, coveralls, vests and bodysuits—is designed for European males and does not properly reflect the diversity in body types, says a resolution presented at the June 2021 AMA Special Meeting.

Improperly fitted PPE sometimes or significantly hampered work for 57% of women, according to survey research cited in the resolution. PPE that’s not properly fitted places users at higher risk for injuries, including tripping from shoes that are too big and losing grip on items because gloves do not fit.

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, studies reported health care personnel who developed pressure ulcers from attempting to form a seal with their masks and some who were diagnosed with COVID-19 were also found to have improperly fitted masks,” said AMA Board Member Willie Underwood III, MD, MSc, MPH. “By providing better fitting PPE, we can protect and preserve critically important health care personnel so they can continue to care for patients on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic and other public health emergencies.”

To address the issue, the House of Delegates directed the AMA to “encourage the diversification of personal protective equipment design to better fit all body types, cultural expressions and practices among health care personnel.”

Bolster health emergency capacity

In a separate action, delegates took actions to address the critical shortages of essential medical supplies such as PPE, testing materials and ventilators.

To help ensure such shortages never recur, delegates modified AMA policy to:
Urge Congress and the administration to continue development of the nation’s capacity to rapidly manufacture the necessary supplies needed to protect, treat, test and vaccinate the entire population and care for large numbers of seriously ill people, without overreliance on unreliable international sources of production.

Encourage states to maintain medical and PPE stockpiles sufficient for effective preparedness and to respond to a pandemic or public health emergency.

Urge the federal government to meet treaty and trust obligations by adequately sourcing medical and personal protective equipment directly to tribal communities and the Indian Health Service for effective preparedness and to respond to a pandemic or public emergency.

Support the position that relevant national and state agencies—such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, and state health departments—continue to plan and test distribution activities in advance of a public health emergency, to assure that physicians, nurses, other health care personnel and first responders having direct patient contact receive any appropriate vaccination or medical countermeasure in a timely and efficient manner.

Read about the other highlights from the June 2021 AMA Special Meeting.