


**To:** Local Coordinators, Bargaining Unit Presidents, Health and Safety Network Leads, and Joint Health and Safety Committee Members from the Executive Booklet

**From:** Diane Parker, RN, Vice-President Region 1, Occupational Health and Safety Portfolio



**Date:** October 19, 2012

**Re:** **Use of appropriate protective gowns**

**C:** Board of Directors, District Service Teams, Provincial Services Team

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Many of you probably read in the February issue of *Front Lines* about one ONA member's efforts to secure more appropriate protective gowns for workers. Elizabeth Hart, who works at Bluewater Health in Sarnia, Local 19, and is on the Joint Health and Safety Committee (JHSC), felt that the thin yellow disposable isolation gowns used by many hospitals were not protecting health care workers at her facility, who had become infested after an exposure to scabies.

Elizabeth gathered evidence that supported her concerns that the gowns in use in her hospital were not always offering sufficient barrier to infection. She raised this issue to successive levels of management to achieve better protection for workers. Communication of her evidence-based success has informed and inspired others such as Clarice Watt, a JHSC member in Local 10, who works at Timmins and District Hospital. Her story about a similar success is featured in the October issue of *Front Lines*.

In arguing her case, Elizabeth referred to authorities such as Ontario's Provincial Infectious Diseases Advisory Committee (PIDAC), which has written that selection of gowns,

“is based on the nature of the interaction with the client/patient/resident and includes...

- a) anticipated degree of contact with infectious material;
- b) potential for blood and body fluid penetration of the gown (e.g., water-resistant gowns should be used in the operating theatre when soaking is anticipated).”

[www.oahpp.ca/resources/documents/pidac/RPAP%20-%20PHO%20template%20-%20FINAL%20-%202011-07-26.pdf](http://www.oahpp.ca/resources/documents/pidac/RPAP%20-%20PHO%20template%20-%20FINAL%20-%202011-07-26.pdf)

She also referenced an American standards organization (Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation) that had helpful information for her case ([www.aami.org](http://www.aami.org)). This organization rates gowns from levels 1-4. Level 1 is for basic patient care providing a fluid resistant barrier. A Level 4 gives you the greatest protection from fluid exposure in all critical zones.

## **Next Steps**

Please advise your members to raise this issue with their supervisors/employer to determine if the gowns being used in your facility provide adequate protection. Also, advise your JHSC to review the issue of gown usage in your facility. Appropriate risk assessments, based on actual work performed, should be conducted by the employer in consultation with the JHSC to ensure that appropriate gowns are used for all tasks. If this is not the case, the employer must take steps to eliminate any hazard. If the employer does not act, the JHSC should make written recommendations to the employer to take all necessary action. A sample recommendation that you can adapt to your needs is attached to this memo.

As you know, the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* requires that employers “take every precaution reasonable in the circumstances for protection of a worker.” The spread of Elizabeth’s evidence-based success increases the evidence that better gowns are “reasonable precautions” for all health care employers to take.

If you have any questions, please contact your ONA Labour Relations Officer.