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Dear Prof Gilbert

I refer to your reported comments in the Australian newspaper today about COVID-19 health care worker infections and the Infection Control Expert Group's (ICEG) continuing tone deaf attitude towards the legitimate concerns that have been consistently raised over its Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) guidelines.

It is reasonable for ICEG to seek to explain its decisions on PPE so that the profession can understand why these have been made as well as for health care professionals to respond when we think the evidence or circumstances dictate otherwise. However, it is completely unacceptable for members of ICEG to disparage front line health care workers who we know put themselves at risk of COVID-19 every day, especially during an outbreak. Blaming the high rates of health care worker infections on apathy, while refusing to accept that there could be any issue with ICEG guidelines is fuelling growing concerns within the health professions that ICEG is simply seeking to defend its own advice at all costs.

The AMA welcomed the establishment of the ICEG/National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce's Infection Protection and Control (IPC) panel, following widespread criticism of ICEG's PPE guidelines. The additional expertise being recruited to this panel will fill a significant gap in the capability of ICEG to advise on workplace infection control. However, your comments today will lead many health care professionals to doubt whether ICEG will take the work of this Panel seriously, particularly if the panel comes to a view that differs from your own.

We understand that the IPC panel will adopt a consensus approach to its recommendations. Given that ICEG Co-Chairs the IPC panel and also has members on it, your comments and those by other ICEG members also lead us to doubt the extent to which the panel will be able to function properly if ICEG panel members are similarly entrenched in their views.

I have been contacted by many members today who have been extremely distressed by your comments. ICEG guidelines are being used every day in our hospitals and have been used as a reason to justify the provision of inadequate PPE in circumstances where doctors and other health care workers are in contact with COVID-19 positive or suspected cases. There is growing resentment towards ICEG's work and a lack of confidence in its recommendations.

I urge you to retract the comments that have been reported in the Australian today and provide the profession with reassurance that ICEG will not obstruct the work of the IPC panel and instead use this extra expertise to deliver the protection that health care workers deserve, including the adoption of a precautionary approach to PPE guidelines..

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a final flourish.

Dr Omar Khorshid
Federal President