**Transcript:**  AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, ABC TV, *News Breakfast with Tamara Oudyn and Lisa Millar*, Wednesday, 26 August 2020

**Subject:**  Healthcare worker infections in Victoria

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**TAMARA OUDYN:**    The Head of the Australian Medical Association is demanding urgent changes to protect healthcare workers on the COVID front-line.

**LISA MILLAR:**        Omar Khorshid has also hit out at the Victorian Government after it admitted up to 80 per cent of those infected with COVID-19 during the State's second wave caught it at work. Dr Khorshid joins us now from Perth. Good morning, Doctor, and thanks for getting up so early to have a chat with us.

**OMAR KHORSHID:**  Good morning.

**LISA MILLAR:**        Now, the Government has been saying here in Victoria that a lot of these cases were being contracted out in the community, these healthcare workers, but now we've learned differently. Were you surprised?

**OMAR KHORSHID:**  No, I was not surprised at all because the sheer numbers of healthcare workers getting infected - being three, four, five, six times as likely as any other Victorian - suggested to us that it had to have be being contracted in the workplace, and the head in the sand approach by the Victorian Government wasn't helpful and didn't add any urgency to the need to actually change what was going on in the various aged care centres and hospitals to stop healthcare workers getting infected.

**LISA MILLAR:**        One other thing, we've been getting loads of messages in from healthcare workers over the last few months, and so many of them have been saying the masks just don't fit properly for women, smaller-faced women - it's not one-size-fits-all. There is a trial underway of fit testing masks, as they put it, one of the hospitals here. I'm surprised it's taken this long to even be doing that.

**OMAR KHORSHID:**  Yeah, look, it's way too late to be doing a trial of whether you need to fit-test masks. We know if you're going to use respirator masks then they need to fit your face, otherwise they just don't work. That's pretty basic stuff, that was known well before this pandemic, because these masks have been used for other reasons for many years.

So, really what we need to see is some leadership at the national level on it, an acceptance that something has gone wrong here, and that if we have an outbreak like this in another State, we're likely to see exactly the same problem. That means we need guidelines that are actually appropriate; we need appropriate personal protective equipment available to every single staff member in every single facility; and we need adequate training. We do need fit-testing for absolutely every healthcare worker needing to wear a respirator mask, and an acknowledgement this is actually a workplace safety issue - it's a basic right of any worker, and healthcare workers should be treated the same as all our other workers in other workplaces.

**LISA MILLAR:**        So, what has to be done to make that happen? Whose decision is it? Where does that come from? Where do those instructions come from?

**OMAR KHORSHID:**  Yet again, it's a complex system of different levels of government and getting them to work together. The aged care sector, unfortunately as we know, is just in a complete disaster in Victoria and that's where the majority of healthcare workers are getting infected - so we need to acknowledge that there's a major issue there, we need national leadership - in our view, a single

individual person who's responsible for getting our aged care sector through this crisis, and similarly for hospitals and other healthcare sectors.

A national agreement, we've got some national guidelines but they don't go far enough; to see those strengthened, accepting at a national level - which includes all our State governments as well - that this is a basic right of any worker. That it's not just the doctors and nurses being difficult, they're actually fearing for their lives, their wellbeing, and that they may bring this virus to their families - that's not fair. We can do it differently. And we have seen in other countries that if you actually put in place a tight regime you actually get zero healthcare worker infections, and that needs to be our target going forward. our target going forward.

**LISA MILLAR:**       Final question right now, Omar Khorshid, as people are heading into work in hospitals and aged care facilities today in Australia, how risky is it for them?

**OMAR KHORSHID:**  Well, Australia's been the best place to be in the world throughout this pandemic so far, apart from Victoria, and of course we're now seeing small outbreaks in other States. So, for the majority of healthcare workers right now, they're safe. In Victoria, we've seen the guidelines change, workers are safer there than before, but we have to acknowledge that something has gone wrong and Victoria needs rapid change now.

The other States have got a bit of time to plan properly and make sure that if and when an outbreak does occur in the community in those other States that the healthcare sector is ready to deliver, both for Australians and looking after them, but also to look after their own workers.

**LISA MILLAR:**       Alright. Dr Omar Khorshid, thanks for your time this morning.

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