

# Position paper on optimizing engagement with industry to facilitate a safe and timely return of health services normally provided in acute hospital settings<sup>1</sup>

## Foreward

HealthTech Ireland is the industry representative body for manufacturers and distributors of medical equipment and services, including diagnostic equipment, medical devices and digital health solutions. Our membership of over 140 companies provide highly trained clinical professionals, biomedical/clinical engineers and medical scientists to support the medical technology in use in the Irish health service. They provide training for clinicians, nurses, biomedical and clinical engineers, and other health care professionals in the application and use of sophisticated and highly technical and software devices.

Representatives of medical technology companies have traditionally been present as needed during peri-operative interventions, as well as pre- and post-operatively to observe, train and support medical personnel using their company's products.

All HealthTech Ireland health care industry representatives (HCIRs) undergo biennial credentialing provided independently by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. The infection control component of this training is particularly relevant at this time.

## Introduction

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, hospitals and surgical facilities nationwide paused elective surgical procedures and other non-urgent and non-essential services, limiting physical access to facilities for non-essential health care personnel, patient visitors and HCIRs.

## Phased Approach

We anticipate a ramping up of services as Covid-19 restrictions are eased on a phased basis which will require increased access for key HCIRs.

We propose a phased approach for access depending on the criticality of need, i.e. starting with critical support followed by support of planned urgent care before the health system gradually returns to normal working.

Critical Support includes repair/installation and maintenance of critical equipment and devices and specialist support for life threatening interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper should be read in conjunction with MedTech Europe's Position Paper on the Access to the Operating Room by Company Representatives

Planned Urgent Care Support would include equipment repair and intervention support for urgent planned care.

Planned Support would include equipment maintenance and repair and intervention support for planned care.

The final phase or return to normal phase would include equipment repair/maintenance and installation of all equipment and devices, intervention support, health care professional (HCP) training and sales activity.

The phased approach may vary within the Hospital groups, regions or be dependent on local circumstances.

## Principles for Access

As mentioned above, HCIRs have a key role to play in supporting HCPs which will necessitate physical presence in health care settings and could involve proximity to patients with COVID-19. The following principals apply:

### All Areas of Hospitals and other Health Care Facilities

*Principle:* Facility social distancing and safety policies applicable to staff, patients and patient visitors should apply equally to medical device representatives in all areas of the facility. Facility access policies for all visitors will fluctuate and should vary based on the current COVID-19 incidence rates and activity in the immediate community.

### COVID-19 Testing and Screening

*Principle:* Facility testing policies for medical device representatives entering both restricted and non-restricted areas should follow current healthcare facility policy.

### Elective Surgical Procedures and Personal Protective Equipment

*Principle:* Surgical case scheduling and prioritisation policies should account for proper inventory of PPE, including PPE for any HCIRs essential to an elective procedure, as per the guidelines and policy of the facility.

### Training and Education regarding COVID-19 Safety and Precautions

*Principle:* HCIRs should understand infection prevention recommendations for COVID-19 according to the guidance on the usage and appropriateness of PPE, and facility policy related to COVID-19 safety principles as issued by NPHET, NEAG or the Covid-19 Health Communications Stakeholder Support.

### General

No visits should be made if the HCIR or a member of their household is displaying any symptoms of COVID-19 and government advice on isolation should be followed.

All visits must be fully documented, including all areas of hospital/clinic visited, procedure/work carried out, start and end time, and supervising HSE staff to enable 'contact tracing' in the event of COVID-19 infection.

Where required, based on government guidelines, appropriate PPE must be utilised for the entirety of the visit.

Companies should risk assess HCIRs to determine if they fall into any vulnerable groups as defined by the government.

#### Pre-visit, HCIRs will:

- ✓ Confirm and document visit arrangements with health care facility. This should include confirmation of access to the care setting and any department, any necessary testing prior to admission and list of PPE required
- ✓ Complete self-screening assessment to ensure absence of COVID-19 symptoms
- ✓ Check any entry requirements for the site.

#### During visit, HCIRs will:

- ✓ Follow sign-in procedures on arrival
- ✓ Limit public transport where possible.
- ✓ Wherever possible social distancing should be maintained
- ✓ Follow instructions from health care facility staff regarding access to areas and use of appropriate PPE
- ✓ Follow recommended decontamination procedures when interacting with any equipment/devices before and after work/training/demonstration is carried out
- ✓ Where possible, government guidelines on 'contact tracing' mechanisms should be employed

#### Post Visit

- ✓ If HCIRs are concerned that they may be displaying symptoms of COVID-19 within 14 days of visiting a health care facility they should visit <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/symptoms.html> and follow the advice given
- ✓ In the event of a COVID-19 infection being confirmed, the HCIR must immediately contact all sites visited within the preceding 14 days

#### Testing

At present, government guidelines do not cover asymptomatic testing of HCIRs, this should be the default position as regards industry access. Should a health care facility site require testing prior to admittance, their recommended protocol should be followed, and they will need to provide this service.