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COVID-related PPE across health care settings has created shortages that have implications for both patient care and HD exposure.

With dermal, direct contact being the most common means of HD exposure, shortages of PPE present significant concern.⁶ The recommended USP PPE requirements are specific to handling HDs and alternative PPE will most likely not meet HD standards. In one example, USP requires that gowns used in HD handling be disposable, single-use gowns made from materials verified to resist permeation by HDs. Yet, providers may be challenged to procure and reserve appropriate PPE during the public health emergency. Exhibit 3 outlines recommended conservation strategies for handling HDs based on the Oncology Nurse Society guidance.⁷

Prior to the pandemic, a Hazard Communication Standard and Standard Precautions were in place to protect health care personnel and patients. The Hazard Communication Standard, an OSHA initiative, requires a written plan on HD classification, handling, and labeling. It also delineates how information is communicated to protect employees, employers, and patients from hazardous drug exposures.⁸ Standard precautions apply to the use of handwashing and PPE when in contact with all patients regardless of their potential infectious diagnosis.⁸ These standards still stand and, along with added COVID-19 considerations, may be beneficial from an HD standpoint because the increased awareness may make nurses and patients more cautious when donning protective equipment, handling medication and supplies, and disinfecting surfaces.

Going forward COVID has shed light on the expanded capabilities of home infusion, which are likely to be utilized post-pandemic. Additionally, the growth of hazardous drug usage in the home infusion setting reiterates the importance of practices to protect health care workers from exposure while providing safe infusions in the home.

Mark Mikhael, PharmD is the Chief Pharmacy Officer at ProHealth Pharmacy Solutions in Maitland, Florida. He can be reached at mmikhael@prohealthmed.com.

Deanna Cordero Da Silva, PharmD is the Pharmacy Lead Intern at AdventHealth Orlando and **Noel Elomari, RN** is a doctor of pharmacy candidate at the University of Florida.

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