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Hospital breakthrough removes the fear factor

The Australian, Australia

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JOHN FERGUSON

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

A story of globally significant medical ingenuity has emerged from the rubble of Australia's second coronavirus wave, as doctors and nurses use a local invention to better treat patients and protect staff.

Western Health and Melbourne University this year helped create a world-leading ventilation hood that is placed over victims, with the twin benefit of protecting staff and improving treatments.

Associate professor Forbes McGain has received the results of an initial study into the effectiveness of the hood, which is designed to contain the droplet spread of the coronavirus.

Dr McGain, who works for Western Health, said the study feedback from the first 20 patients had been "overwhelmingly positive".

Many thousands of healthcare workers globally have been infected with COVID-19 while trying to save the lives of the sick and dying.

The ventilation hood separates medical staff from the patient without losing line of sight and contains the droplets.

For Dr McGain, an intensive care specialist at Melbourne's Sunshine Hospital, the first obvious benefit is in the wellbeing of nurses and doctors. "The nurses in particular feel safe," he said.

"That's the most important thing for the hood. The nurses aren't as worried nursing and caring for quite unwell patients."

The hood, which effectively

creates a bubble around the patient, also enables staff to provide less invasive therapies and improved interaction with those being treated.

Some 17 of the hoods are being used in Victoria as the medical world starts to struggle with the increasing load of the virus.

There is rising interest in the device from other hospitals and it has presented as a significant opportunity for local manufacturing and potential global exports.

The ventilation sucks air away from the patient but restricts the flow of droplets, with the hood acting as a barrier. It also enables other intensive care machines to function without compromising the safety of the staff.

The project was made possible with the support of Melbourne University's School of Engineering, led by professor Jason Monty.

"We only have 17 of these hoods at the moment but more can be made," Dr McGain said. "There is an opportunity for expansion with local manufacturing."

There are 32 coronavirus inpatients at Sunshine Hospital with four in intensive care.

Western Health research nurse manager Sam Bates said the presence of the ventilation hoods was embraced by staff: "They are just so excited to see it."



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A patient is treated in the intensive care unit of Sunshine Hospital in Melbourne on Tuesday

AARON FRANCIS