

## ESNO Position Statement Infection Prevention and Compassion

### “Clinical isolation should never mean human isolation”

#### Infection Prevention Week 2022

It is paramount to implement effective infection prevention and control measures when threats to public health like COVID19 emerge. The imperative is to protect as many people as possible, particularly the most vulnerable. The preventative measures carried out across all countries, required cooperation and altruism to achieve their aims. It seems reasonable to expect that every person able to do so would engage with these measures and work in a spirit of solidarity to mitigate the impact of a once in a century threat to public health. Where this expectation is not met, it seemed reasonable to use available mechanisms to enforce safe practices.

However, it is vital to monitor both the measures and the impact that maintaining these have had on all people, once again with attention paid to those most vulnerable and those whose voices are very often left unheard<sup>i</sup>.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have left too many people alone unnecessarily, deprived of human contact of the non-technological variety, other than that provided by *healthcare workers*<sup>\*</sup>. Too many people in health and care settings spent their last moments on earth alone. Clinical isolation should never mean human isolation. Solutions are available to ensure and enable safe and compassionate interactions between people<sup>iiii</sup>. The harms of this human disconnection can be immense, in some cases greater than the harms of the infection itself<sup>ivv</sup>.

The European Specialist Nurses Organisation calls for:

1. **Recognition and action:** All stakeholders to recognise and mitigate the impact that clinical isolation has on the physical, psychological and social wellbeing of persons
2. **Person centeredness and compassion:** Infection prevention and control measures must be informed by the best available evidence, but they must also balance the holistic needs of patients, their relatives, and loved ones and be implemented humanely and from a perspective of person-centredness. This is especially important during end-of-life and in the context of maternal and child health. Where prohibitive measures are enforced, they must be limited to the immediate crisis only<sup>1</sup>.
3. **Empowerment and solution-focus:** Those wishing to ‘speak out’ to promote compassion, and human connectivity should be supported and empowered to exercise this right and those in responsible positions or positions of power should encourage this, including through education. Collaboration across disciplines and with patient and community organisations and institutional representatives will support the development of safe, compassionate solutions that ensures that clinical isolation never again means human isolation.

---

*\* “We acknowledge the sterling work of healthcare workers in fulfilling this role and do not underestimate the impact this had on their wellbeing. However, moving forward clinical isolation should never mean human isolation.”*  
Adriano Friganovic, ESNO President

---

## References

- <sup>i</sup> Policy brief: the impact of COVID-19 on older person. United Nations. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Policy-Brief-The-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Older-Persons.pdf>
- <sup>ii</sup> Infection prevention and control should never be at the expense of compassionate care <https://www.nursingtimes.net/opinion/open-letter-infection-prevention-and-control-should-never-be-at-the-expense-of-compassionate-care-16-10-2020/>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Storr J, Kilpatrick C, Vassallo A. Safe infection prevention and control practices with compassion - A positive legacy of COVID-19. *Am J Infect Control*. 2021;49(3):407-408. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7904455/>
- <sup>iv</sup> Clarissa Giebel, Katarzyna M. Lion, Klara Lorenz-Dant, Aida Suárez-González, Catherine Talbot, Emily Wharton, Jacqueline Cannon, Hilary Tetlow & Jochen René Thyrian (2022): The early impacts of COVID-19 on people living with dementia: part I of a mixed-methods systematic review, *Aging & Mental Health*
- <sup>v</sup> Suárez-González A, Storr J, The BMJ Opinion Enforced restrictions to care home access—unfair, unnecessary, and harmful <https://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2021/07/15/enforced-restrictions-to-care-home-access-unfair-unnecessary-and-harmful/>
- <sup>v</sup> WHO(2016)Guidance for managing ethical issues in infectious disease outbreaks. World Health Organization. <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/250580>

*The European Specialist Nurses Organisation (ESNO) is a non-profit organisation and the goal is to facilitate and provide an effective framework for communication and co-operation between the European Specialist Nurses Organisations and its constituent members. ESNO represents the mutual interests and benefits of these organisations to the wider European community in the interest of the public health. Members of ESNO consist of individual European specialist nurses organisations.*

*[www.esno.org](http://www.esno.org) – [secretariat@esno.org](mailto:secretariat@esno.org)*