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Clinical Support: An Unconventional Request – Providence’s 100 Million Masks Initiative



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In early March, Seattle, WA, was the epicenter of the US COVID-19 pandemic. Providence St. Joseph Health had seen the first reported US case of COVID-19 on January 20 [1] and quickly found itself responding to a growing crisis, with little information about how best to care for patients while protecting frontline staff.

On March 16, 2020, Providence System Library Services received an email from senior leadership with the subject line: “Urgent – An Unconventional Request.” We were asked to pause all other work to search for viable mask patterns that could be easily and quickly made at home by volunteers and to develop mock-ups of the best patterns.

For this outside-the-box request, library staff looked beyond the medical literature and scoured the wide world of the Internet for workable do-it-yourself masks, particularly those designed by nurses, physicians, or others in the health care field. We identified three options, including a simple YouTube tutorial for a pleated surgical mask, a second surgical mask with a pocket for additional filter material, and a kit in the shape of an N95 mask [2–4]. We sewed prototypes and sent them overnight to Providence system leadership in Renton, WA, to be assessed by the Infection Prevention team for efficacy.

Providence soon launched the [100 Million Mask Challenge](#). Kits containing medical grade surgical wrap were distributed to volunteers in the Seattle area and sewn into masks for our providers on the frontlines. The community responded, and Providence ran out of kits in less than a day. Industry stepped up soon after: [Kaas Tailored](#), a local furniture factory, took over production. 100 Million Masks grew exponentially, along with the needs of heroic hospital providers across the country, and Providence passed the initiative to the [American Hospital Association](#).

Our small and mighty library team continued to support Providence, within and beyond traditional library roles. One librarian helped to make face shields for Southern California hospitals, and others sewed cloth masks for community use. We posted a tab of [COVID resources on our website](#), sent targeted daily updates, and provided extensive searches for nursing research leaders. These searches were used to develop evidence tables on several topics:

- Cleaning and reprocessing of personal protective equipment (PPE)
- Extended use of PPE
- Universal and community masking
- Hospital-provided scrubs

We were thrilled and inspired by the 100 Million Mask initiative, and we were honored to be involved at the very beginning in this and in more conventional services for frontline caregivers and emergency leaders.

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