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Transcript: AMA President, Dr Omar Khorshid, 3AW, Friday, 7 August 2020

Subject: healthcare workers with COVID, PPE for healthcare workers

ROSS STEVENSON: Get on this: healthcare workers in their 20s and 30s account for more than two-thirds of Victorian medical staff currently infected with COVID-19. Dr Omar Khorshid, President of the Australian Medical Association, the AMA. Doctor, good morning to you.

OMAR KHORSHID: Good morning, Ross.

ROSS STEVENSON: Welcome to the program. Congratulations on your recent appointment. Interesting time - well, talk to Russel about it - interesting time to take the reins. I think most people would be staggered with that stat.

OMAR KHORSHID: Look, what it really does it reflects who is in our health workforce and who is on the frontline, who's the cannon fodder as we try to deal with this health crisis; and it is young people. They're the ones providing direct patient contact in aged care centres and in our emergency departments, and other health care settings. I think it also reflects the fact that young people are a little more social - they do get out more. And not all of these healthcare workers have contracted the disease at work. Some of caught it at home, in the community, some are out and about. So, it's probably a mixture of those factors. But despite the fact that young people are not much less likely to die from this, we still expect long term health consequences of infection with this virus.

ROSS STEVENSON: And last week of course, we got the news of one of the people in ICU was a 32-year-old doctor.

OMAR KHORSHID: Yes, we've been very, very concerned to hear that news. And last I heard, he was still very unwell. And it underlines, for all medical staff and emergency department staff, the seriousness of this outbreak, and the fact that we need to do absolutely everything we can to protect the healthcare workforce. Now, in our hospitals, we're very pleased to see that the Victorian Government has mandated the use of appropriate masks to protect healthcare workers, and that's great. Unfortunately, we're yet to see that rollout around the rest of the country. But the AMA and others are working very hard to make sure that healthcare workers are given what they need to protect themselves from this very serious infection.

RUSSELL HOWCROFT: So, this must be putting some pressure on staff numbers, doctor?

OMAR KHORSHID: It absolutely is, because it's not just the more than a thousand healthcare workers that they knocked out of the workforce, but it's also all the other healthcare workers who had direct contact with those people in the preceding few days prior to their diagnosis. So, it's actually taken a huge number of frontline healthcare workers out of those facilities and put enormous pressure on those who remain at a time when of course things are very busy. So, it's absolutely critical that as much as possible, all Victorians do what they can to help control the virus. And that means listening to the rules, obeying the curfews, wearing masks, doing all the things that the Government have asked them to do, because it's the only way we can get on top of the virus and also protect - not just the hospitals, but also GPs, the

aged care sector, and other frontline workers like paramedics who we really need to look after us if we get sick in this crisis.

ROSS STEVENSON: Just one last quick question. How do you feel as a representative of doctors who are putting themselves in harm's way every day? How do you feel about an anti-mask protest that's planned for Sunday?

OMAR KHORSHID: Look, you know, it takes all parts to make a society. To be honest, it makes me sick, because I think these people are just demonstrating extraordinary selfishness. And the idea...

ROSS STEVENSON: [Talks over] Ignorance?

OMAR KHORSHID: ...oh look, the whole- all of it. The idea that putting on a mask is some kind of major infringement of your civil rights at a time when there are thousands and thousands of Victorians fighting this virus, and we stand on the precipice of going into an American style outbreak which, would decimate not just the economy but the health system, and ruin so many people's lives. It is selfish, it's very, very disappointing behaviour. And I really hope the Victorian Police do the right thing, not just to stop the protest but actually to stop those protesters further spreading the virus amongst the community.

ROSS STEVENSON: Good on you, Doc. Which requires the police to put themselves in harm's way.

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