



Sixty seconds on . . . beards

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What is this, the *Beard Management Journal*?

Now calm down, we're not about to start doling out fashion tips for your facial fuzz. We're talking about how having a hairy face could stop protective face masks from fitting properly.

Stubble causing trouble?

It can do. Derek Sandeman, the medical director of the University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust, has written to his clinical staff asking anyone working in high risk areas, such as the emergency department and the acute medical unit, to consider shaving.

That's barbaric! Why?

Sandeman sent the email in light of mounting concerns about the spread of covid-19. While there were no cases reported locally, he said that as many staff as possible needed to be prepared to treat patients, and that means having a face mask that fits properly.

Does this mean we all have to shave?

Well, to be fair, not all facial hair was banned. Sandeman included a handy diagram to show what was and wasn't acceptable, including 15 different types of moustache. He also made it clear that it didn't apply to anyone with strong cultural or religious reasons for a beard.

That was a close shave

Yes, and so far there has been no national edict demanding a clean shaven workforce. Some doctors, however, have already decided to go beardless^{1,2} to ensure a good mask fit, while others report being offered a hood, which covers the whole head.^{3,4}

Do face masks even work against covid-19?

It's a good question. Ben Killingley, consultant in acute medicine and infectious diseases at University College London Hospital, says that there is little evidence that the surgical face masks favoured by the general public protect the wearer from infection. However, he says it's different for specific respirator masks worn by healthcare workers.

So, it's beards off then?

Depending on the spread of the virus, it looks like it, I'm afraid. There seems to be no doubt that doctors seeing infected patients will need to wear the appropriate personal protective equipment.

- 1 trentconsultant. 28 February 2020. twitter.com/trentconsultant/status/1233291572432769025.
- 2 maryam_0m4r. 27 February 2020. twitter.com/maryam_0m4r/status/1233165757997092871.
- 3 rajacexplains. 27 February 2020. twitter.com/rajacexplains/status/1233130579320877057.
- 4 ICMdoc. 27 February 2020. twitter.com/ICMdoc/status/1233056856362409984.

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