

Researchers develop reusable gown that eases supply chain and environmental impact issues

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The Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) shortages brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be an opportunity for a Virginia health system to not only address supply chain issues, but also to improve their environmental footprint.

By designing and producing a custom, reusable isolation gown, Inova Health System, based in the Washington D.C. suburbs, ensured adequate supply of their second-most used type of PPE, while also eliminating 213 tons of waste per year.

The team from Inova presented their [success story](#) at the Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology's (APIC) 49th [Annual Conference](#), June 13-15 in Indianapolis.

Before 2020, the five-hospital system used 3.1 million [single-use](#), disposable gowns each year, amounting to about 213 tons of waste. When COVID hit, the gowns, along with other PPE, were in short supply.

"During the pandemic when supplies were scarce, we used any gowns that we were able to procure that met infection prevention standards, regardless of the brand," said Michelle Peninger, BSMT, CIC, Assistant Vice President of Infection Prevention at Inova.

"Our infection prevention team realized we had an opportunity to create a better gown that would protect our frontline workers and reduce waste. By assessing all of the products in use, we were able to develop a more comfortable, safe, and user-friendly option that was also sustainable," Peninger added.

Inova contracted with a sports apparel manufacturer to produce a new isolation [gown](#) that is better fitting, cooler to wear, easier to don and doff, and can be laundered and reused up to 100 times. The new gowns are currently in use at two of the system's five hospitals.

"The process involved a lot of trial and error, but it was so worth the effort," said Lucy He, MLS(ASCP), CIC, Director of Infection Prevention and Control at Inova. "The innovative thinking of our team resulted in the development of a great product and our [team members](#) are very happy with the new gowns. We look forward to introducing them into all Inova hospitals."

"Infection prevention is all about [problem solving](#), with patient and provider safety as the primary goals," said 2022 APIC President Linda Dickey, RN, MPH, CIC, FAPIC. "The Inova team's innovation is more functional, sustainable, and not vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, ensuring that [healthcare workers](#) have the necessary PPE to prevent the spread of infections. We are grateful to them for sharing their success with a broader audience."

More information: [annual.apic.org](https://www.apic.org/annual)

Provided by Association for Professionals in Infection Control

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