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ABSTRACT

BEHIND THE MASK

Surgical Face Masks in the Operating Theatre: Re-examining the Evidence. M.G. Romney *Journal of Hospital Infection* 2001; **47**: 251–256.

With the increased vigilance in cross-infection control over the last decade, we are now used routinely to donning a face mask for operative procedures. Surgical face masks were introduced by a German surgeon in 1897. Over recent

years, the efficacy of face masks has been questioned. This review article examines some of the evidence behind the use of face masks for preventing operative infection and preventing transmission to the operator. On the subject of the former point, the review concluded that the evidence is at best equivocal and there is a paucity of randomized controlled trials. However, some studies have demonstrated that not wearing face masks did not increase the incidence of post-operative infection. The transmission of contaminated aerosols from patient to

operator is more important in dentistry; again, there is little convincing evidence against this practice, although it has been argued that very small particles may still reach the operator's face directly through filter of the mask. The more recent introduction of full face visors has yet to be studied satisfactorily but may offer superior protection. For the time being, the evidence still advocates the use of the face mask for operative procedures.

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