

## When unity is strength: No-profit foundation provides personal protective equipment during covid-19 pandemic in Italy.

Alfredo Pece<sup>1\*</sup>, Federica Fossataro<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Eye Clinic, Melegnano Hospital, Vizzolo Predabissi, Italy

<sup>2</sup>Ophthalmology Unit, Department of Neurosciences, Reproductive Sciences and Dentistry, University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy

### Abstract

It was December 2019 when Wuhan, in China, became the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in two months the disease spread fast and uncontrolled throughout the world. On 20 February 2020 since the first official case of Covid-19 was recorded in Italy, measures were put in place immediately to contain the infection, starting with a lengthy lockdown, which helped block the explosive pandemic. In addition, people were obliged to keep ‘social distances’ from each other, to wear surgical-type facemasks, and to wash and disinfect hands frequently. Countries everywhere were taken by surprise and this explains the initial difficulties in the supply of personal protective equipment. In Italy, despite the precise procedures for prevention that were swiftly put into practice, for several weeks it was almost impossible to find personal protective equipment. Health workers, who were more exposed to the virus than the rest of the population, found themselves for several weeks without the P2 and P3 masks they needed, suffering heavily. The Fondazione RETINA 3000, a no profit foundation, already took action in January 2020 to collect funds which were put to use with no bureaucratic delay, to purchase materials for Italian healthcare staff. In conclusion, during a period when social distance was mandatory, distance help and contribution from hundreds of people allowed Fondazione RETINA 3000 to give ophthalmologists and physicians in Italy valuable help showing how private structures and non-profit foundations can work constructively to make essential supplies available even in extremely difficult circumstances.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Retina 3000 Foundation, Personal protective equipment, No-profit foundation.

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### Description

The year 2020, due to the coronavirus pandemic, is still a period of health emergency characterized by fear, anxiety and social isolation. SARS-CoV-2 virus, with a measure of only 120 nanometers, is causing thousands of deaths and putting the societies and economies of the whole world in enormous difficulty.

It was December 2019 when Wuhan, became the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic, and in two months the disease spread uncontrolled throughout the world. On 20 February 2020 the first official case of Covid-19 was recorded in Italy, and for the next two months Italy was the country with the largest number of people infected and deaths [1]. Measures were put in place immediately to contain the infection, starting with a lengthy lockdown, which helped block the explosive pandemic [2].

Right now, at the beginning of September 2020, the world can count 27 million people infected and more than 890,000 deaths [3]. Besides the lockdown, people were obliged to keep ‘social distances’ from each other, to wear surgical-type facemasks, and to wash and disinfect their hands frequently. There was a widespread campaign to make the public aware of the dangers of the virus. Nevertheless, the virus was little-known and highly contagious!

Countries everywhere were taken by surprise, so no-one was prepared – this explains the initial difficulties in the supply of

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In Italy Lombardy was the region hardest hit, and even though precise procedures for prevention were swiftly put into practice, for several weeks it was almost impossible to find PPE. Health workers, who were more exposed to the virus than the rest of the population, found themselves for several weeks without the P2 and P3 masks they needed and in fact doctors and nurses suffered heavily. The lengthy official procedures for purchasing, the closure of the Chinese borders – where most masks were made – created major delays and real difficulties in hospitals everywhere.

The Fondazione RETINA 3000, a no profit foundation headed by AP, already took action in January 2020 to collect funds and in a few days gathered €60,000, which were put to use with no bureaucratic delay, to purchase materials for healthcare staff. By February P2 and P3 masks were only available on the market at prohibitive prices – from €15 to €60 each! and surgical masks were just as hard to find, at around €3 each. However, from March to June the Foundation managed to procure supplies that were donated to 22 hospital ophthalmic departments in Lombardy, and seven clinics in southern Italy. In all, the donations amounted to 4000 P2 masks, 1000 packs of alcoholic disinfectant gel, 200 pairs of protective goggles, 100 eyeshields, 700 gowns, and 2000 pairs of gloves. This PPE was also distributed to numerous doctors (pediatricians, cardiologists, family doctors, and neurosurgeons) who asked the Foundation for help.

Therefore, in a period when social distance was necessary, distance help and contribution from hundreds of people allowed Fondazione RETINA 3000 to give ophthalmologists and physicians in Italy valuable help. This all goes to show how private structures and non-profit foundations can work constructively to make essential supplies available even in extremely difficult circumstances.

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### **Conflict of interest**

The author(s) declare no conflict of interest.

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### **\*Correspondence to:**

Dr. Alfredo Pece

Eye Clinic

Melegnano Hospital

Vizzolo Predabissi

Italy

E-mail: [pece.retina@mclink.it](mailto:pece.retina@mclink.it)