

The New Normal

On April 7th, 2020, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, in a media briefing, announced that anyone leaving their homes to deliver essential services or to conduct necessary business, must wear a face mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19. This declaration created an instant demand for face masks, and of course, an unavoidable shortage resulted.

The Foundation for the Enhancement and Enrichment of Life (FEEL) is a charitable organisation whose mission is to distribute foodstuff, clothing, shoes, as well as hygiene, medical, household, school and disaster relief supplies across Trinidad and Tobago.

FEEL was assigned by the government of Trinidad and Tobago, the responsibility of

sourcing and obtaining a standardised mask that was fit for purpose, and which had to be produced and supplied in sufficient quantities. According to Myles Lewis, Head, Corporate Social Responsibility, NGC, "NGC saw this as another opportunity to help stop the spread of the virus, and all companies in the Group contributed to the FEEL mask call."

Through the efforts of FEEL, there was some assurance that most members of the public were equipped with an effective mask for their use as required by health officials. FEEL also provided all donors with regular reports on the procedure for distribution of the masks.



A Breath of Fresh Air

A shortage of personal protective equipment for healthcare workers and ventilators for patients in many countries dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak was also a feature of the pandemic in Trinidad and Tobago. There was public concern that there was a shortage of ventilators and additional challenges in purchasing these items from foreign suppliers.

Heeding the call for help was The University of the West Indies (The UWI), one of NGC's partners in the fields of innovation, technology and research. NGC was proud to partner with The UWI in a new venture and supported via financial assistance. The project involved the design and manufacture of a prototype ventilator which can be used to address future outbreaks.

A multidisciplinary team of engineers and medical professionals who were working in close partnership with the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI), made a daring national effort to design and manufacture essential medical equipment which were in short supply or would quickly be depleted in Trinidad and Tobago if things got worse. The team actively worked on designing and



Face shield testing by doctors at POSGH ICU

producing UWI-Vent, a ventilator to assist those with acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS).

This initiative has sought to provide a readily accessible local fallback in the supply of required medical equipment in the event of an escalation of the pandemic, compounded by global shortage of these much-needed items.

Lisa Burkett, Manager Corporate Communications, NGC, shared her thoughts on the project: "As part of our



Aerosolisation hood testing at POSGH

collaborative effort to contribute where possible during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide assistance to mitigate the spread, NGC quickly embraced this project as we saw it being beneficial to the long-term fight against this and other pandemics. The equipment will always be needed by medical institutions to address respiratory challenges in patients, and so planning to have a bank of equipment that is easily accessible under a crisis was considered the best form of support."