**BOA and GIRFT statement on ‘ring fenced’ orthopaedic beds in the COVID-19 context**

It has long been recognised that 'ring fencing' orthopaedic beds for planned care is the only acceptable standard for our patients. The GIRFT report[[1]](#footnote-1) published earlier this year discusses surgical site infection and notes that ‘it is likely that the maintenance of ring-fencing has contributed to the decreasing infection rates in the orthopaedics specialty.’

Sharing ward accommodation with other specialties where patients may have infections or be carrying potentially infecting organisms runs a high risk of transfer between patients and exposing them to the risk of active infection. The consequences of infection for orthopaedic patients are serious. It is the express recommendation from GIRFT (given the overwhelming evidence to support this separation of patients into specialty cohorts) that we corral and protect our patients. This particularly applies where any form of implant is to be inserted.

We are aware there is a disturbing trend that the provision of ‘COVID-free' pathways and areas is considered to supersede ring-fencing of orthopaedics. The inference is that providing ‘COVID-secure’ ward space for multiple patient groups is of greater importance than segregation of the orthopaedic patient groups.  This is categorically NOT the position of the BOA or GIRFT. These are two separate issues that should not be conflated. BOTH are important; keeping our patients as COVID secure as possible is clearly of paramount importance, but not at the expense of mixing patients from different specialties in the same ward space.

We recognise that providing both ‘COVID-secure’ ward space for elective patients and ring-fencing orthopaedics within this, will put further strain on our bed resource approaching winter and a second COVID wave. However, we need to provide both COVID free pathways and orthopaedic ‘ring fenced' ward space in order to promote high standards of patient safety.

1. GIRFT (2020) Getting it right in Orthopaedics: A follow-up on the GIRFT national specialty report on orthopaedics, available online at: <https://gettingitrightfirsttime.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GIRFT-orthopaedics-follow-up-report-February-2020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)