

## ‘Command and Control’: managing supply chain risk and disruption in a pandemic Coimbra Hospital and University Centre, Portugal

### What was the challenge?

Coimbra Hospital and University Centre (CHUC) is one of the largest Portuguese hospitals, distributed over six decentralised medical institutions and facilities. One of CHUC’s challenges during the coronavirus pandemic was to successfully help assess and manage the hospital’s material needs in ‘real time’ in order to effectively purchase and allocate vital equipment, drugs, and consumables in response to an incredibly dynamic supply environment due to COVID-19.

### What was the task?

CHUC’s Procurement and Logistics Department established a central ‘Command Unit’ to improve communication and to better manage the hospital’s material needs in ‘real time’. The Unit acted as a nerve centre for the four branches of the hospital’s Procurement and Logistics department (Pharmaceutical Goods; Consumables; Equipment & Services; Logistics) to quickly identify and mitigate operational threats. The Unit comprised coordinators of the department’s four sectors, as well as engineering experts, pharmacists, physicians, senior nurses, and the hospital’s central ‘Risk Manager’.

### What was the action?

At the onset of COVID-19, the Command Unit implemented a four-pronged strategy to ensure that CHUC’s demand for supply was met.

- 1. Active survey of equipment, drugs, test kits and reagents, PPEs in traditional and non-traditional supply chains.** Besides traditional suppliers, the Unit systematically searched for PPE sources from other markets, such as the industrial painting sector and industries of agrochemicals and automobiles. For some basic PPE items (e.g., masks), in-house production was carried out with the help of the hospitals’ seamstresses after the purchase of adequate raw materials.
- 2. Technical evaluations of all COVID-19 related equipment, consumables, drugs, and technologies needed for an effective pandemic response** – including:

- Deliberate formal or informal market consultations developed by the procurement and logistics department.

- Spontaneous commercial proposals from unknown manufacturers or suppliers, either well established retailers or small resellers.
- In-kind donations offered to the hospital, through a Donations Committee set up in assistance by Coimbra’s Procurement and Logistics department.
- Collaboration proposed by local and/or regional companies for the development of equipment, mainly PPEs, for hospital use.

- 3. Developing and updating a simple, easy to consult and use, database of all technically validated commercial proposals compiled for the group of 34 PPEs considered vital in supporting the pandemic effort. The database included:** estimates for a two-month period on supply availability, updated after each cycle.

All articles in the database were translated into English and Chinese, to avoid misinterpretations from foreign suppliers. The database included all known information on PPEs for analysis (demand for EC certification or branding; technical specifications, photographs, company’s profile). When feasible, product samples were also established as essential and required.

- 4. Ensuring fast and well-informed decisions on all COVID-19 related purchases, so that availability of equipment/consumables stocks and the efficiency of the decisions (balance between price and quality) would not be compromised.**

### What were the results?

The Command Unit has proved to be an effective measure for creating a robust supply web and thus avoiding stock-outs of critical equipment or goods by dealing with the supply chain in a less reactive or bureaucratic form; diversifying CHUC’s traditional supply lines; increasing the scope and speed of well-informed purchase decisions, thus averting the pitfalls of panic buying (i.e., on over-priced merchandise).

Establishing a Command Unit has therefore proven to be a strategy that has successfully dealt with the present crisis and must keep operating until the end of the pandemic. Such a model had not previously been harnessed by CHUC but will be replicated in the future for other public health emergencies.