

18 January 2021

**POSITION STATEMENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN THORACIC SOCIETY ON THERAPEUTIC  
BRONCHOSCOPY IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SEVERE COVID-19**

The South African Thoracic Society (SATS) is concerned that a recently aired Carte Blanche interview with Dr E Taban may have sparked an inappropriate and potentially unsafe practice of “routine” therapeutic bronchoscopy for patients with severe COVID-19 pneumonia. The interview (<https://youtu.be/3aYmoLjuf8Y>) has been shared extensively on social media and has led to some conspiracy theories (“What the government is not telling you...”). Dr Taban also published his observations in our society’s journal [Afr J Thoracic Crit Care Med 2020;26(4)]. It is important to note that this was a small case series which did not show a mortality benefit.

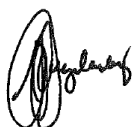
While SATS cannot exclude a potential short-term benefit from a therapeutic bronchoscopy in selected patients, there remains limited scientific or even other observational data to suggest that this procedure has an impact on outcome. Several institutions in South Africa have attempted therapeutic bronchoscopy in intubated patients, particularly in those with tenacious secretions and blocked endotracheal tubes and have found either (1) little mucous plugging or (2) no or a minimal transient effect on oxygenation.

We therefore strongly believe that therapeutic bronchoscopy should not currently be seen as a “panacea” for severe COVID-19 disease and certainly should not be offered as part of routine therapy. Bronchoscopy, apart from aerosolisation and a threat to personnel, poses significant dangers to a patient who is already profoundly hypoxic; even more so if a patient has to be transported to theatre for the procedure.

In summary, barring further evidence, **SATS strongly discourages therapeutic bronchoscopy as part of the routine management of severe COVID-19 pneumonia.** Where indicated in a particular case (e.g., lobar collapse due to a mucous plug) the procedure should ideally be performed as a mobile bronchoscopy with the shortest possible procedure time.

We will continue to review the literature for further evidence for benefit or harm of therapeutic bronchoscopy in severe COVID-19 disease and will review this statement as necessary.

ISSUED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN THORACIC SOCIETY



Prof. Coenie Koegelenberg (SATS President)