

May 28, 2020

## Message to the community from Janice Skot, RVH President & CEO

Healthcare has changed dramatically over the past two months.

Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre's (RVH) hallways are largely empty of visitors; faces are hidden behind masks and shields; RVH's beloved 'Blue Brigade' volunteers aren't here to greet people with their friendly smiles; and many operating rooms remain silent.

To ensure hospitals in Ontario had enough beds to care for a surge of COVID-19 patients, scheduled, non-urgent surgeries and procedures were stopped in mid-March.

RVH continued to perform emergency surgeries, as well as vital cancer procedures, however, almost 3,500 fewer procedures were performed compared to the same period last year. We recognize the frustration these delays have caused.

Thanks to your adherence to public health measures, the COVID-19 curve continues to flatten and the economy has begun to re-open. Now it's time to plan the resumption of some non-urgent procedures.

RVH has developed a cautious, staged ramp-up plan that protects against the spread of the virus, while staying ready to respond to unexpected COVID-19 surges.

The government, which must approve the plan, has set out strict criteria that must be met before hospitals can resume non-urgent surgeries. Firstly, the number of COVID-19 cases in the region must be manageable. Hospitals must also ensure they have enough protective equipment, medication, staff and community services to care for recovering patients. And we can't start to ramp-up if our occupancy rate is above 85 per cent or if patients are being cared for in hallways. All beds on some RVH units are already full.

We're working with our regional partners to determine how and when scheduled procedures can re-start and we'll rely on evidence and ethics to prioritize the backlog of cases. Remember: COVID-19 is still circulating in the community and infection control precautions will be in place for some time. Until we have a readily-accessible vaccine, hospitals won't be going back to 'normal' and new precautions and procedures may mean things take longer than they used to.

The pandemic has given hospitals an opportunity to imagine how we can do things differently, including expanding virtual care, performing more cases on an outpatient basis or in the community, and extending operating room hours. We must also ensure patients are cared for in the right setting; not in a hospital bed if they don't require that level of specialized care.

We know many of you are anxious to have your procedures done and RVH is eager to resume these services. But the ramp-up won't be like flipping a switch. This is very complex and it's going to take weeks, not days, so please be patient.

As your regional health centre, area residents can be confident that safety – for our patients and our staff -- will always be RVH's North Star, and our highest priority.

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### For more information:

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Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre is the largest hospital in the region of North Simcoe Muskoka serving a population of 450,000 residents. RVH's team of 430 physicians, 2,500 employees and 750 volunteers provides exceptional care and specialty services to almost half a million residents, including cancer care, stroke services, regional cardiac care, orthopedics, regional renal program, intensive care, regional adult and child and youth mental health and interventional radiology. RVH is focused on delivering high-quality, safe care that puts patients and their families first. For more information visit [www.rvh.on.ca](http://www.rvh.on.ca)