

June 8, 2020

RVH begins safe, gradual surgical ramp-up

Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre (RVH) has begun to ramp-up scheduled surgeries and procedures that were paused in mid-March when the provincial government directed hospitals to stop non-urgent procedures to ensure they maintained enough beds, supplies and medication to care for a potential surge of COVID-19 patients.

RVH has worked closely with other hospitals in Simcoe Muskoka to develop a 5-Phase Recovery Plan. Phase 1 of the plan, focused on scheduled surgical procedures, endoscopy and interventional cardiology, received government approval late last week and began today. Other procedures will be ramped-up in the coming months as the next phases of the recovery plan are approved.

“Ramping-up is very complex, so RVH’s plan takes a safe, measured and equitable approach to resuming procedures,” says RVH President & CEO Janice Skot. “COVID-19 is still circulating in the community, so the ramp-up must be done in a cautious, safe way that protects against the spread of the virus, while ensuring RVH remains ready to respond to any unexpected COVID-19 surges.”

The provincial government has set-out strict criteria that hospitals must maintain during their ramp-up. The number of COVID-19 cases in the region and in the hospital must remain manageable. Hospitals must ensure they have enough protective equipment, medication, staff and community services to care for recovering patients, and occupancy rates can’t exceed 85 per cent. Some patient care units at RVH are already at 100 per cent occupancy.

Throughout the pandemic, RVH continued to keep a few operating rooms open and performed almost 1,000 emergency surgeries, as well as vital cancer procedures. By comparison, the health centre would typically perform almost 3,500 cases between mid-March and the end of May.

“Although the surgical pause was necessary to ensure hospitals had capacity for COVID-19 patients, we recognize it has been difficult and frustrating for patients whose care was postponed, particularly those who have already waited some time for their procedure,” says RVH’s Chief of Staff Dr. Jeff Tyberg. “RVH is anxious to provide care as soon as possible, and our top priority is to make sure everyone – patients, staff and physicians – remains safe during this pandemic.”

RVH urges patients to remain patient. The backlog of cases won’t be eased quickly and there will be a “new normal” in hospitals in the future. Infection control precautions will be in place for some time, including screening upon entry, enhanced cleaning, masks, swab-testing for any patients with symptoms and visitor restrictions. Physical changes to RVH’s spaces, new precautions and procedures mean patients will have a different hospital experience than they have had in the past and things may take longer.

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