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# Op/Ed Submission

## IH progress update in renewing surgeries

Submitted by: Doug Cochrane, Board Chair, Interior Health

The patients in Interior Health who had their surgeries postponed due to COVID-19 have not been forgotten and through the surgery renewal commitment announced by the Minister of Health on May 7<sup>th</sup>, scheduled surgeries are once again being delivered.

Across Interior Health, 16 facilities are delivering scheduled surgeries in addition to emergency and urgent procedures. Interior Health has a contract with one private facility to deliver surgeries, and that site is also now running at full contracted capacity.

We started to call patients on the wait list in early May to see if they wished to proceed with their surgery, and since then, we have reached out to 7,303 patients. Scheduled surgeries resumed on May 18<sup>th</sup>, and by June 7<sup>th</sup> we completed 2,018 scheduled surgeries and 777 unscheduled surgeries, for a total of 2,795 surgeries. We performed 149 more surgeries than the previous week, an increase of 15.3 percent. In Interior Health, surgery renewal is well underway.

The first phase of the surgery renewal is focused on patients needing urgent surgeries: patients whose operations must occur in fewer than four weeks; patients who have had their surgery postponed; and patients who have waited longer than twice their accepted clinical wait time benchmarks. Surgeries that can be safely conducted as day procedures or outside of the main operating room, such as cataract surgeries, are also part of this first phase.

Although we are moving forward with renewal, the impact of pausing scheduled surgeries this spring is ongoing. We know there were already patients waiting for the dental, hip, knee and other surgeries that we had hoped to provide. We also know that COVID-19 has further extended their wait which is difficult news for patients and their surgeons.

At this time, we will be addressing patient needs based on urgency, prior postponement and time waiting for surgery. As we move forward, we are committed to restoring timely access to all surgeries.

Part of our surgery renewal commitment to patients means that over the summer we'll be identifying and implementing strategies to increase operating room hours with the goal to support more procedures. This will take creativity and new thinking. With these efforts, we believe we can keep up with ongoing and new demands for surgery and, over the next 17 to 24 months, complete the surgeries that were postponed due to COVID-19 in March, April and May.

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It's a demanding timeline, and we need to recognize that surgery renewal is highly vulnerable to external forces, such as the second wave of COVID-19 this fall that Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry and health officials around the world have indicated could happen. Subsequent waves or surges in new COVID-19 cases may impact our hospitals and the number of surgeries that can be safely performed. Even as we are resuming surgeries now, we are also preparing for the potential challenges ahead.

Each one of us must continue to use the skills that Dr. Henry and Interior Health public health leaders have taught us to stop the spread of COVID-19. By working together we have flattened our curve and brought our province to the point where we were able to resume scheduled surgeries. Our sustained commitment will enable the doctors, nurses and all healthcare workers to continue to provide surgeries for patients in need.

Everyone across Interior Health is 100 per cent all-in on surgery renewal. And to help them, at home and in our communities, we all need to stay 100 per cent committed to stopping the spread.

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